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JANUARY 2015 VOLUME 25 ISSUE 1

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound



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**INTERVIEW** WONG KAR WAI ON HIS MARTIAL ARTS EPIC

## THE GRANDMASTER

**PLUS**

### THE BEST FILMS OF 2014

● 'BIRDMAN' AND THE RESURRECTION OF MICHAEL KEATON ● 'SCHOOL OF BABEL'  
● JOHN BERGER ON CHARLIE CHAPLIN ● 'THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY' ● 'INTERSTELLAR'



# D·W·GRIFFITH'S INTOLERANCE

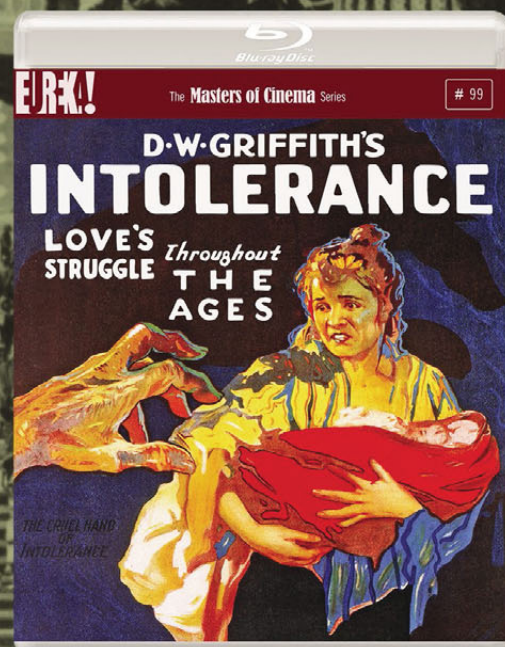
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## Flight of fancy

*Birdman* sees Alejandro González Iñárritu find a welcome new lightness of touch, argues **Paul Julian Smith** PLUS **Anne Billson** looks back over the career of the film's star, Michael Keaton

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##### The horizontal Wong Kar Wai

Wong Kar Wai's respect for traditional martial arts is firmly in evidence in *The Grandmaster*, which explores the life of the legendary Ip Man. But does his narrative lose its way in the battle between style and substance? By **Tony Rayns** PLUS **James Bell** talks to Wong about the film's production and explains his lifelong fascination with martial arts PLUS **Leon Hunt** on the long tradition of kung fu movies about real-life martial-arts masters like Ip Man

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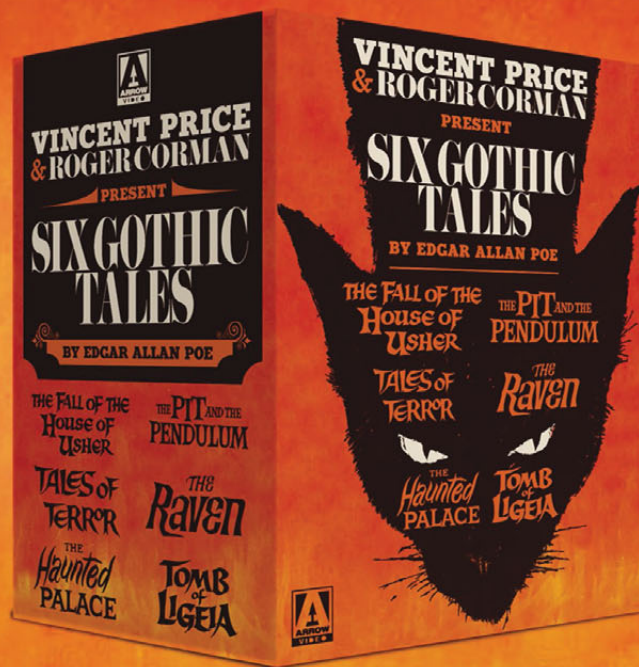
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#### Some notes about the art of falling

In the century that has passed since The Tramp first strolled into the frame on cinema screens, the world has changed deeply. Yet Charlie Chaplin's early films have lost none of their surprise or humour or bite or illumination, and their relevance now seems more urgent than ever. By **John Berger**







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**Editorial enquiries**

21 Stephen Street London W1T 1LN  
t: 020 7255 1444  
f: 020 7580 5830  
w: bfi.org.uk/sightandsound  
e: S&S@bfi.org.uk

**Social media**

f: facebook.com/SightSoundmag  
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**Subscriptions**

t: 020 8955 7070  
e: sightandsound@abacusemedia.com  
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**CONTRIBUTORS**

**Holly Aylett** is a filmmaker, cultural sector director, lecturer and consultant

**John Berger**'s most recent book is *Understanding a Photograph*

**Anne Billson** is a film critic, novelist and photographer

**Michael Brooke** is a DVD and Blu-ray producer at Arrow, and a freelance film critic and historian

**Geoff Brown** writes on film and classical music for the *Times*

**Philip French** is former film critic of the *Observer*, and the author of several books on the cinema

**Noel Hess** is consultant clinical psychologist in psychotherapy, Camden NHS Psychotherapy Service

**Leon Hunt** is senior lecturer in film and TV studies at Brunel University. His books include *Kung Fu Cult Masters: From Bruce Lee to Crouching Tiger*

**Pamela Hutchinson** writes about silent cinema at silentlondon.co.uk

**Pasquale Iannone** is a film academic, writer and broadcaster based in Edinburgh

**Geoffrey Macnab** is a critic and film journalist

**Michael Pattison** is a freelance film critic

**Nick Pinkerton** is a freelance film critic. His regular column 'Bombast' appears in *Film Comment*

**Tony Rayns**'s 25 years of involvement in Korean cinema are celebrated in Seo Wontae's documentary *The Not-so Distant Observer*

**Neil Sinyard** is emeritus professor of film studies, University of Hull

**Paul Julian Smith** is distinguished professor in the Graduate Center, City University of New York

**Ginette Vincendeau** is the author of *Brigitte Bardot: The Life, The Legend, The Movies* and many other books on cinema

**COVER**

Tony Leung in Wong Kar Wai's *The Grandmaster*. Retouched by DawkinsColour

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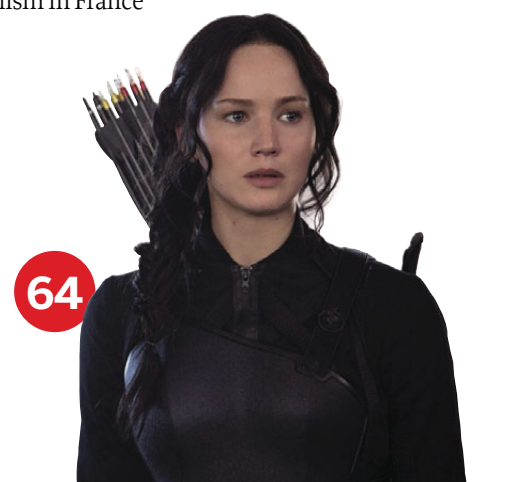
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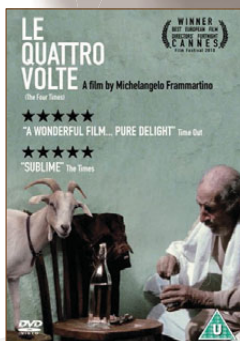
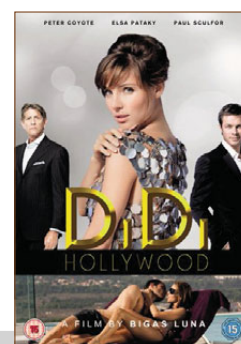
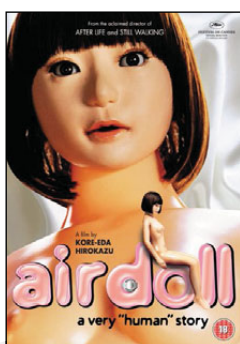
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## EDITORIAL

### Editor

Nick James

### Deputy editor

Kieron Corless

### Features editor

James Bell

### Web editor

Nick Bradshaw

### Production editor

Isabel Stevens

### Acting chief sub-editor

Jamie McLeish

### Sub-editors

Paul Fairclough

Jane Lamacraft

Ben Walters

John Wrathall

### Researchers

Mar Diestro-Dópido

### Credits supervisor

Patrick Fahy

### Credits associates

Kevin Lyons

Pieter Sonke

James Piers Taylor

### Design and art direction

chrisbrowndesign.com

### Origination

Altimage

### Printer

Wyndeham Group

## BUSINESS

### Publisher

Rob Winter

### Publishing coordinator

Brenda Fernandes

### Advertising consultant

Ronnie Hackston

T: 020 7957 8916

M: 07799 605 212

F: 020 7436 2327

E: ronnie.hackston@bfi.org.uk

### Newsstand distribution

Comag Specialist

T: 01895 433800

### Bookshop distribution

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T: 020 8986 4854

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# Editorial Nick James



## MORE OR LESS ABOUT ACTING

What do we mean when we talk about great film acting? On page 95 of this issue, in a DVD review of two jointly packaged Monte Hellman westerns, *The Shooting* and *Ride in the Whirlwind*, Nick Pinkerton writes: “[Millie] Perkins gives a performance that’s out of place amid the general tone of saddlesore naturalism... The dissonance of mismatched acting styles [alongside Jack Nicholson] would appear to be music to Hellman’s ears – if this and *Two-Lane Blacktop*’s counterpoising of Oates’s bravura BS artist against the affectless trio of James Taylor, Dennis Wilson and Laurie Bird are indicators.”

I haven’t seen either of these westerns yet, but I am an admirer of *Two-Lane Blacktop*, perhaps partly because the dominant performance style is the laconic and deadpan approach I more often prefer, though I do also adore Warren Oates. Most directors (and critics) have a preference for either the tamped-down, cooler approach said to suit cinema and realism better, or the more theatrical delivery that underlines Jacques Rivette’s claim that “all films are about the theatre”. In general, though, I’d say Hellman’s seeming generosity towards mixed registers of acting may be one of the things that held his career back. Yet I know that there are regular contributors to *S&S* who will disagree. For Hellman’s fans are passionately loyal.

Brad Stevens, our regular online columnist, would certainly be one of them. In an edition of *Bradlands* in the magazine, ‘Self-made men’ (*S&S*, December 2012) Stevens wrote with great perspicacity about how characters in movies often have to grapple with questions of performance themselves. His example was *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*. “The film,” he said, “seems to be concerned with the clash of two public performers: on the one hand [you have] Billy’s refusal to withdraw from his position as ‘star player’ and retreat into anonymity (even though he knows full well this refusal will result in his death); on the other, Garrett’s reluctance to play the role he has been cast in: Billy’s killer.” It follows that if you accept that in real life there are moments when we are ‘performing’ and other moments when we’re ‘being ourselves’ then we must admit that in any kind of realism there will already be mixed registers of acting.

Two things set me thinking along these performative lines. The first was our recent Deep Focus study (‘Birth of the Method’, *S&S*, November) and the accompanying season at the BFI Southbank; the second, the release of Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Birdman* (see page 28).

*Most critics have a preference for either the tamped-down acting approach said to suit realism, or the more theatrical delivery that underlines Rivette’s claim that ‘all films are about the theatre’*

**WRITER'S ACTING TASTES**  
CUT OUT AND KEEP  
**SCORECARD**

Reviewer	MORE	LESS
Kim Newman		
Geoff Andrew		
Nick Pinkerton		
Ryan Gilbey		
Violet Lucca		
Hannah McGill		
Adam Nayman		
Ian Christie		
Ashley Clark		
Tony Rayns		
Total:		

The Method is often characterised by what Laurence Olivier may have said to Dustin Hoffman as he was working up his ‘affective memory’ on *Marathon Man*: “It’s all very well Dustin, but have you tried acting?” What Foster Hirsch made clear in his November essay, however, was that while there is “more than one method... the inner work practised at the [Actors] Studio was ideally suited to the intimacy of film acting”.

No film could be more focused on the intimacy of acting than Iñárritu’s riveting *Birdman*. We watch the cast deal with a scenario that in itself is a critique of what acting is about. Michael Keaton plays Riggan, an ageing movie star famous for the titular superhero role who puts on a Broadway play based on a Raymond Carver short story. Quite early on we see an on-stage scene in which an actor is so bad Riggan seems to cause a light to fall and knock him out. His replacement, Mike Shiner (Edward Norton), proves a brilliant exponent of the Method, replacing the fake gin and gun props with the real things and attempting real intercourse in a stage sex scene. So you’ve got an actor (briefly) playing bad acting, a superhero movie star reaching towards a high-tone stage performance, and a Method actor who’s brilliant and an asshole; they’re all switching between playing themselves and playing their stage roles. When you think of how complicated the registers at play here are, it’s astonishing anyone tried to pull it off.

Being set in such a complex performance world doesn’t make it easy to empathise with *Birdman*’s characters, but neither could one imagine being anyone in *All About Eve*. A joke at the end claims that Riggan has achieved (I won’t say how) a new theatrical genre, ‘super-realism’, in which artistry and reality become inextricable. Such a film might succeed in pleasing all tastes in terms of acting, but if you want a game to indulge in before Christmas, the next time you read a review, see where the writer’s acting taste sits. It’s a hidden determinate prejudice that writers are often unaware of. As for me, I’ll take the ‘weather face’, on which you can read emotion without words, over the declamatory front-of-stage speech every time, though there’s always room for both.



IN THE FRAME

## SOUNDS OF THE UNDERGROUND



Contains moderate sax: Krzysztof Komeda pictured with his wife Zofia in a portrait by Wojciech Plewinski

Jazz signified liberation across the old Eastern Bloc but in Poland it emerged, with cinema, in the vanguard of a creative revolution

**By Michael Brooke**

When Wladyslaw Gomulka, newly appointed first secretary of the ruling communist Polish United Workers' Party, brought the curtain down on Stalinism by instituting a political and cultural

thaw in 1956, he set in train (albeit inadvertently) one of the country's great creative explosions. Such ambiguous masterworks as Andrzej Wajda's feature film *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Lenica's experimental animation *House* (1958) and composer Krzysztof Penderecki's musical shriek of collective pain *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960) would have been scarcely imaginable only a few years earlier, and the fact that this cultural transformation occurred simultaneously across numerous disciplines also led to some

memorably alchemical collaborations.

One of the most fertile of these is celebrated by Jazz on Film Records' newly released four-CD box-set *Jazz in Polish Cinema: Out of the Underground 1958-1967*. While post-war Polish filmmakers were forced to conform to the rigid stratification (and stultification) of Socialist Realism, Polish jazz musicians had no public platform at all – the 'underground', in their case, consisting of private jam sessions and the clandestine swapping of recordings. But they were able to hone their skills to the point where, in August 1956, the first

### Guys and Dolls

Sinatra is Nathan Detroit and Brando is Sky Masterson in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's classic 1955 musical (right), which is rereleased by Park Circus in a new restoration on 19 December, at BFI Southbank, Irish Film Institute, Dublin, and selected UK cinemas.



### The Jarman Award

The winner of this year's Film London Jarman Award is announced at London's Whitechapel Gallery on 8 December. The shortlisted filmmakers are John Akomfrah, Sebastian Buerkner, Laura Buckley, Marvin Gaye Chetwynd, Steven Claydon, Redmond Entwistle, Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard, Ursula Mayer ('Medea', right), Rachel Reupke and Stephen Sutcliffe.



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Jazz Festival in the Baltic seaside resort of Sopot showcased some impressively accomplished homegrown musicians, including Krzysztof Komeda (born Trzcinski, 1931-69) and Andrzej Trzaskowski (1933-98). Both would shortly become important film composers as well.

The initial link was made by the name of Jerzy Skolimowski, then a writer and passionate jazz fan who was a friend of both Komeda and Roman Polanski, then an unknown film student. Skolimowski opportunistically introduced the two men when Polanski made a dialogue-free short called *Two Men and a Wardrobe* (1958) and Komeda recycled a theme ('Lullaby') he had initially unveiled in Sopot in 1956, expanding it into a 12-minute composition that formed the entire soundtrack to the film (featured on the relevant disc in full). In the following decade or so, until his death at just 37 in April 1969, Komeda scored more than 60 films, including virtually all of Polanski's up to and including *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) – the exception, *Repulsion* (1965), also had an original jazz score, by Chico Hamilton.

By 1960, Komeda and Trzaskowski were also scoring feature films for more established directors. For Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Night Train* (1959), Trzaskowski adapted Artie Shaw's 1930s standard 'Moonray' into a haunting blues-tinged lament, whose wordless vocals (performed by Wanda Warska) perfectly underscored the film's theme of lost souls on an overnight express train. For Wajda's *Innocent Sorcerers* (1960), Komeda contributed not only the music but also the inspiration: its fictional protagonist Bazyli was, like Komeda, a trained doctor who was increasingly drawn to jazz. Skolimowski was once again the linchpin, introducing Komeda to Wajda and rewriting the script to make it a more convincing study of youth culture than the thirtysomething director felt capable of creating himself.


Polanski's debut feature *Knife in the Water* (1962) was a gift of a subject for a composer, offering the stripped-down ingredients of three people, a boat and a wide expanse of water. Komeda obligingly threaded in a similarly spare score, in tone and method strongly reminiscent of the Miles Davis-Louis Malle collaboration *Lift to the Scaffold* (1958), with the Swedish saxophonist Bernt Rosengren improvising rippling circles around Komeda's deceptively simple chordal accompaniment.


All these films' soundtracks are included in the set, along with those from Skolimowski's own early features *Walkover* (Trzaskowski, 1965) and *Le Départ* (Komeda, 1966), Janusz Morgenstern's



Blow for freedom: Jerzy Skolimowski's *Le Départ*

*Opening Tomorrow* (Komeda, 1961) and Jerzy Stefan Stawinski's *Penguin* (Komeda, 1965), the latter showcasing Komeda's long-standing passion for the music of J.S. Bach. Gratifyingly, one of the discs also acknowledges the importance of short films and documentaries to Polish cinema of the period: in addition to the Polanski short, there's Edward Etler's *Accident* (Komeda, 1963) and Boguslaw Rybczynski's *Jazz Camping* (Trzaskowski, 1959), the latter documenting a jazz festival held in the mountains.

These titles are, of course, the merest fraction of what could conceivably have been included, but curator Selwyn Harris has wisely decided to favour depth over breadth. For all but *Le Départ* he was able to track down the magnetic recordings of the original sessions, which often featured multiple and alternative takes – *Night Train*'s main theme turns up vocally (both wordlessly and with recognisable lyrics) or performed on vibraphone (Józef Gawrych) or trumpet (Andrzej Kurylewicz), the latter sinuously intertwining itself around Warska's smoky vocals. The illustrated 80-page booklet is as thorough a work of scholarship as anything on the discs themselves, and is particularly valuable for its identification of individual performers, who were frequently uncredited on the films – including giants such as saxophonists Zbigniew Namysłowski and Michał Urbaniak and trumpeter Tomasz Stanko. Indeed, Stanko carries a musical torch for Komeda to this day, for reasons all too apparent from this astonishing collection. 

 **'Jazz in Polish Cinema: Out of the Underground 1958-1967' is available now from Jazz on Film records**

## LISTOMANIA BACKSTAGE MOVIES

With *Birdman* set backstage on Broadway, we spotlight ten other films whose stories take place largely within the walls of a theatre.

- 1 **Twentieth Century** (1934)  
Howard Hawks
- 2 **To Be or Not to Be** (1942, pictured)  
Ernst Lubitsch
- 3 **The Band Wagon** (1953)  
Vincente Minnelli
- 4 **Two Stage Sisters** (1964)  
Xie Jin
- 5 **L'Amour fou** (1969)  
Jacques Rivette
- 6 **Opening Night** (1977)  
John Cassavetes
- 7 **The Last Metro** (1980)  
François Truffaut
- 8 **Noises Off** (1992)  
Peter Bogdanovich
- 9 **Topsy-Turvy** (1999)  
Mike Leigh
- 10 **Me and Orson Welles** (2008)  
Richard Linklater



## QUOTE OF THE MONTH ERNST LUBITSCH

'You could name the great stars of the silent screen who were finished; the great directors gone; the great title writers who were washed up. But remember this, as long as you live: the producers didn't lose a man. They all made the switch. That's where the great talent is'



## Sci-fi Film Classics

To mark the BFI's current 'Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder' project, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan have published nine new Film Classics books, all with gorgeous new bespoke cover artwork by a range of artists and designers. The titles are: Mark Kermode on 'Silent Running', Peter Kramer on 'Dr. Strangelove', Paul McAuley on 'Brazil', Andrew M. Butler on 'Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind', Barry Forshaw on 'The War of the Worlds', Michelle Le Blanc and Colin Odell on 'Akira', Mark Bould on Tarkovsky's 'Solaris', Roger Luckhurst on 'Alien' and Kim Newman on 'Quatermass and the Pit' (right).



## Vincent Price in Six Gothic Tales

The half-dozen Edgar Allan Poe adaptations Roger Corman made with Vincent Price (right) in the 1960s are all among the highpoints of Gothic cinema, and have been collected in this extremely covetable new Blu-ray box-set by Arrow films. It may be too late for Halloween, but there's still time to bring a seasonal chill to Christmas lists.





# SOMETHING BREWING

At once humble and elevated, tea's signifying of both familial warmth and stiff snobbery makes for a neat cinematic shorthand



**By Hannah McGill**

The making and drinking of tea has explicit ceremonial aspects in East Asian cultures, and is a less formal but no less

powerful ritual in the United Kingdom. A teapot, therefore, stands for a sort of socialising that has an element of performance about it, and a form of sharing and providing that also indicates adherence to social stricture. A teapot is a symbol in which formality and informality, the warmly comforting and the distantly conventional, combine. Ozu Yasujiro, as well as habitually positioning his camera at the level at which one would sit to participate in a Japanese tea ceremony – that of the tatami floor mat – used many a teapot, including a red one that featured as a motif in his later films. The teapot serves as a reminder of the visual poetry of everyday objects in space, and the simple tenacity of certain human needs, desires and functions; but it is also a sort of assertion of authorship, an “Ozu was here”. “It’s like the red signature stamp of a Japanese woodblock artist; it is his maker’s mark,” writes Roger Ebert in his essay on *Tokyo Story* (1953). The teapot is not, in this interpretation, there to add authenticity but to impose distance; to remind us that we are watching a construction in which every visual element has been carefully arranged. (Maybe not always so carefully: Donald Richie in his 1977 book *Ozu: His Life and Films* notes as an error a cut in 1933’s *Woman of Tokyo* in which a teapot goes directly from steaming and bubbling to sitting cold, although others regard the film’s continuity jumps as quite intentional.) Aki Kaurismäki references the red teapot in *Drifting Clouds* (1996) and Koreeda Hirokazu also uses a teapot to pay Ozu homage in *Maborosi* (1995).

In British cinema, the pouring of tea from a pot is a frequent signifier of security, domesticity, warmth and tradition – all of which cosy states can, of course, easily stew into uncanny oppressiveness. In *The Iron Lady* (2011), Meryl Streep as Margaret Thatcher offers tea to US Secretary of State Alexander Haig, just after haranguing him about the necessity of war over the Falklands, with a fluting “Shall I be mother?”, at which he can only gape in incomprehension. She certainly can be his mother, is the implication – or at least boss him just as effectively; and Thatcher as take-charge matriarch is either a nightmare vision or some sort of feminist triumph, depending on how you choose to interpret the film’s confused political stance. The improbability of a prime minister interrupting a crucial international meeting to pour the tea is a sacrifice to the convenient symbolism of a powerful woman subverting a homely maternal role – as well as a quick jab at the Americans for not understanding our tea terminology.



**Pot shot:** Ozu Yasujiro often placed his camera at the level at which one would sit for a tea ceremony

Insistence on proper tea-making as a mark of British traditionalism – old-fashioned and, teabags aside, little altered by progress; slow and somewhat elaborate to prepare; associated with benign and soothing effects rather than a fast-acting caffeine jolt – is a familiar trope in film

*A teapot is a symbol in which formality and informality, the warmly comforting and the distantly conventional combine*

and television. It can also indicate a snobbish sort of Anglophilia; elaborate high tea is taken in Baz Luhrmann’s *The Great Gatsby* (2013), while insistence on tea is a mark of Australian-British P.L. Travers’s resistance to Walt Disney’s efforts at professional seduction in *Saving Mr Banks* (2013). In the film that eventually results from their negotiations, *Mary Poppins* (1964), tea-pouring also features prominently; while in both of Disney’s versions of *Alice in Wonderland* – the 1951 animation and Tim Burton’s 2010 reimagining – the Mad Hatter’s tea party provides unsettling evidence of the proximity of



**Feeling the strain:** the *Alice in Wonderland* tea party always teeters on the verge of outright insanity





A nod to Ozu in Kaurismäki's *Drifting Clouds*



Doris Day and Rock Hudson in *Tea for Two*

ritual and tradition to sheer madness. Burton's version doesn't make that much of the party, sadly, and in general, rather strains the British specificity out of its source material; but the fact that this older Alice is remembering a previous, childhood visit to Wonderland adds to the story's sense of the weary re-enactment of ceremonies defining adulthood from a child's perspective.

To deploy a teapot in a contemporary setting, meanwhile, indicates a stubborn adherence to tradition over convenience. A British designer experienced a surge in sales of a particular teapot after it was used in the BBC's *Sherlock* series: a perfectly finicky accoutrement for Benedict Cumberbatch's modern-day embodiment of a quintessential British eccentric.

The British bias in terms of onscreen tea drinking survives despite early efforts by Britain's Tea Bureau to popularise tea drinking among Americans via the movies. According to Kerry Segrave in *Product Placement in American Films: A History*, a lobbyist named Bill Treadwell laid claim to having got tea scenes into 83 movies in two years, one proud coup having been to persuade Warner Bros to change the name of *No, No, Nanette*, starring Doris Day, to *Tea for Two* (1950). He also oversaw nationwide tours by a pair of actresses from the film, dubbed Miss Iced Tea for Two and Miss Hot Tea for Two, who gave out packets of tea in the lobbies of cinemas showing the film. I was going to end by saying that their names are lost to posterity – but they aren't! The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* from September 1 1950 records them as Camille Williams and Ann Zika, respectively. Under the name Angela Stevens, Ann Zika would go on to star in *Creature with the Atom Brain* (1955) – though in that film her character's calming beverage of choice is the covert martini. ☺

## THE FIVE KEY...

# MARX BROTHERS SCENES

To mark a forthcoming BFI season, we offer a selection of moments that shows the dazzling breadth of the brothers' anarchic genius

By Nick Bradshaw

The boot-polish moustache and cigar are markers of cod sophistication, the jabbering wheeler-dealer is a cod Italian and the plastic-limbed mute is a cod idiot. And speaking of cod, the art dealer is really Abey the fishmonger, the password – shout it loudly – is 'swordfish', and here's a (live) seal for the ambassador of Trentino's (wax) seal... As the BFI Southbank warms up January with a season of the best of the Marx brothers – seven classics showcasing Minnie Marx's vaudevillian sons, whose melting-pot American clownery took the early talkies by storm – we hazard some kind of taxonomy of their comedic powers; or at least, five token scenes from the further reaches of irreverence.



## 2 'Take a letter to my lawyers,' from *Animal Crackers* (1930)

One form of Groucho's absurdist simulations of patrician authority are his letters dictated to Zeppo. This one to his lawyer, one Charles H. Hungadunga, starts with a parody of business jargon: "Gentlemen, question mark... yours to hand and beg to rep, ie, to whit, in lieu..." He orders carbon copies to be thrown away and the originals too. "You may go Jameson. I may go too."



## 4 Harpo's Punch and Judy show, in *Monkey Business* (1931)

Lest anyone mistake the Marxes' assaults on civilisation for any kind of Rousseauian idealism, here's Harpo, the troupe's elective feral idiot, as physically versatile as he is morally farcical. *Monkey Business* might be his best outing, from chasing frogs and blondes to this rubber-faced masquerade, inducting ship's officers in a live puppet show to the delight of a juvenile audience.



## 1 The mirror scene from *Duck Soup* (1933)

The greatest of the brothers' legendary pantomime skits has Harpo and Chico's inept spies suddenly finding a (mostly) pitch-perfect capacity for imitating Groucho's preposterous President Firefly in his nightwear, to persuade him they're merely his reflected figments and that they haven't just broken his mirror. Virtuoso in its timing, and head-spinning in the sheer physical ingenuity on display.



## 3 Left-handed moths, in *Animal Crackers*

A *Night at the Opera*'s 'Sanity Clause' scene (everyone knows there isn't one) is justly fêted, but more purely demented is this extended demonstration of Chico-style deductive logic, in which he details his 'Sherlock Holmes-a method' for solving the riddle of a stolen painting. First: ask everyone in the house if they took it. No gain? Try next door. Suppose there is no house next door? "Well then we gotta builda one!"



## 5 Impersonating Maurice Chevalier, in *Monkey Business*

Music and the Marx brothers make uneasy bedfellows, given Harpo and Chico's stupefying harp and piano interludes; more joyous is their reversioning of Verdi's 'Anvil Chorus' for cash register (*The Cocoanuts*), the sabotage of *A Night at the Opera* – and this scene, in which all four stowaways take turns trying to sing their way off an ocean liner in the guise of the French crooner.



# A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

Julie Bertucelli's uplifting classroom documentary *School of Babel* offers an insightful child's-eye view of the immigrant experience in France

**By Nick Bradshaw**

Child's-eye movies typically use their innocent's perspective as a potent way in to a story, emphasising curiosity over prejudice, and as a shortcut to making the world look strange and new. As its title suggests, Julie Bertucelli's *School of Babel* contains multitudes of these alien perspectives, all brought together in one class of Paris's La Grange aux Belles secondary school, where the expertly patient teacher Brigitte Cervoni is spending her final year helping pre- and early-teen immigrants from Ireland to China and Ukraine to Senegal gain a quick foothold in French language and culture. Many bear the weight of more experience than you'd wish, but it's still an unusually uplifting social study, a collage of journeys to integration as well as maturity, and by simple design a breath of relief in the bogey-ridden immigration debate.

Bertucelli, best known in the UK for her 2003 drama *Since Otar Left* and 2010's *The Tree* with Charlotte Gainsbourg, has been making documentaries for 20 years. This one is gently self-aware – the children also make their own film about themselves and enter it into Chartres' Ciné-Clap festival of youth films, and both it and Bertucelli's film are part of the glue that joins the kids to their new world.

**Nick Bradshaw:** The film adds to what's almost a genre of French classroom films, from Bertrand Tavernier's *It All Starts Today* [1999] to Nicolas Philibert's *Etre et avoir* [2002] and Laurent Cantet's *The Class* [2008].

**Julie Bertucelli:** Everywhere should make films about school, because it's one of the most important places for kids, for education and democracy – and it's universal. It's true the French make a lot: maybe because they have [a tradition of] strong democratic, republican free schools, without religion.

**NB:** Is this class rare in making its own films?

**JB:** Maybe not so rare. I discovered them because I was jury president for a school film festival... It's a wonderful way of learning. [Modern] kids [live in a world] full of images, and they have to learn the difference between advertising, documentary and fiction.

For my film it was especially great that this year this teacher decided the theme of their film would be 'difference'. I met her at the end of the school year and fell in love with this idea of the world in one class. I came back in September and met all these strong kids from 22 countries, with so many reasons for migrating – love stories, economic stories, musical reasons. Yet they all have the same issue: if you don't encourage them they won't succeed in integrating themselves. You need to give luck, hope and always respect them, and this teacher was wonderful about that.

**NB:** How do you feel the kids' familiarity with moving images affected their presence or performance on camera?

**JB:** Certainly at the beginning for the kids



A great big melting pot: Julie Bertucelli

the filming was about performing and acting. But I showed them my films and talked a lot about them, and I think they understood that I have to be like a little mouse, not there. And when they did try something for the camera, especially with one or two of the girls who are very strong characters, I had a way to make them understand – by not filming them.

Mostly, though, it was a relationship: I was part of the class all this long time we spent together. People don't forget the camera, but... my presence was not a problem for them. I was quite moved that they accepted me – I think because it's an age, a moment where you are focused on deep[er] problems.

The films they made themselves came later in the year, but it was interesting for them to see the difference: how for an interview on camera you're really conscious that you have to say something. It was funny to hear them say, "Oh, I don't like to be in front of the camera," when I'd been filming them all year! So they felt the difference between the deep work of documentarists and journalists who come for three days, ask you new things, send you inside

*It's the face of the new world, this mix. In France, the people most afraid of immigrants live where there are no immigrants*

and out. Some people try to direct you; I don't at all. If they didn't want to be filmed, I'd go away.

**NB:** The classroom provided some strong formal constraints, with its bare handful of setups.

**JB:** I like these kinds of constraints: a school with white walls, overhead lights, an ugly computer at the back... you have to find other ideas. It's not easy like when I make a film in Australia with wonderful landscapes. Here I only had the tree in the schoolyard to show the seasons passing. But I wanted it to be a film of closeups. I was focused on the faces and relationships, the discussion and the way of living together. And also on growing up, how the relationships are changing. You can read so many things between the lines in a closeup.

**NB:** It's a very 21st-century film, in its makeup and subject-matter.

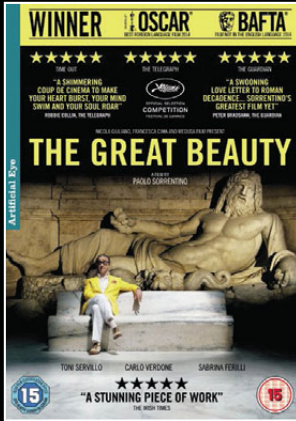
**JB:** It's the face of the new world, this mix. In France, the people most afraid of immigrants live where there are no immigrants. When I screened the film in France, everyone said, "Great, for once we see it's a great thing to have immigrants..." For me it's normal to invite people from all over the world, and they have a lot to teach us as well as wanting to integrate, succeed and push the country, like everybody. When you live with people, you see they're normal people like you with the same problems, kids, wives, love stories, work – you have no reason to be afraid. But people are used to seeing images of something else. ☺

**i** *School of Babel* is released on 5 December and is reviewed on page 89

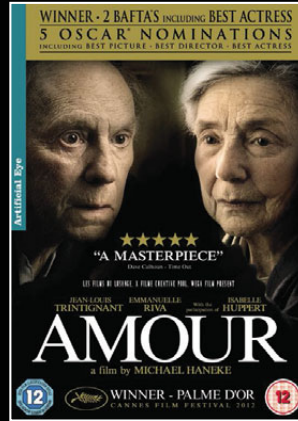


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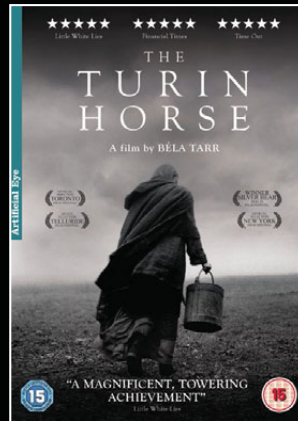
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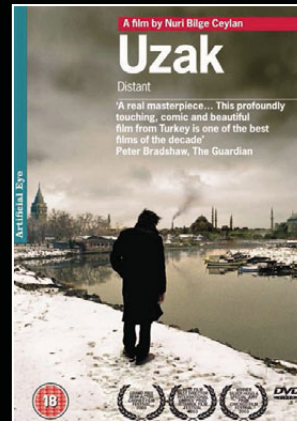
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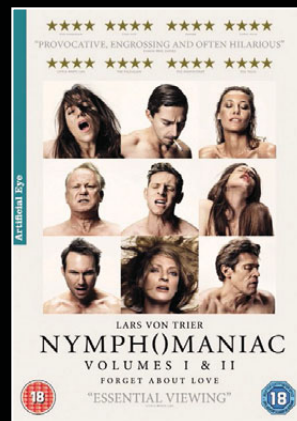
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# 50 WEEKS TO LEARN FILM, PT 2

In the second half of my ideal film-school syllabus, the students would ponder sex, secrets and memory in films, and perhaps drop some acid



**By Mark Cousins**

Last month I imagined an ideal film course or film school. It would last 50 weeks, each week being devoted to a theme, technique, experience or stimulation. Each of these would be written on one of 50 cards. The deck of cards would be shuffled, and the course would then proceed in the post-shuffle order. Last time I got as far as week 25, then ran out of space, so here is the second half. I should say that some excellent work is done in this area – at the UK's National Film and Television School, for example, or La Fémis in Paris, and Béla Tarr's teaching sounds great – but that doesn't stop me from sticking my oar in. Some of you thought my first 25 weeks were a bit out there, to which my response, I'm afraid, is to make my second 25 more so...

**26 How to end a film:** 2001, the endings in Ozu films, Claire Denis's *Beau travail*, Imamura's *Tales from the Southern Islands*, Antonioni's *L'eclisse*, Billy Wilder's *The Apartment*.

**27 The psychology of crying:** crying and pathetic fallacy, Douglas Sirk, trying not to cry, and the ending of *It's a Wonderful Life*.

**28 LSD:** those students who want to, take acid and allow themselves, if they want, to be filmed. The experience then leads to studies of Kandinsky, *musique concrète*, surrealism, David Lynch, Maya Deren and Jonathan Glazer films.

**29 Iconoclasm and media portrayals:** a visit to Esfahan in Iran.

**30 Interview:** filmmakers conduct interviews and are, regularly, interviewed themselves. So this week is a study of the best interviews ever done, in film, TV, radio and print. The *Paris Review*, Paul Morley, *Face to Face*, etc.

**31 Secret:** a study of films with secrets, such as *The Crying Game*, *Vertigo*, *The Usual Suspects*, Kiarostami's 'Koker' trilogy. How do plot twists, or style twists, work, and what are the best ways to do them? This week should, itself, contain an unexpected twist for its students.

**32 The frontier:** students go and live for a week on the island of Lampedusa, or another place of migratory movement where human rights are being abused.

**33 Sex:** how to do sex in cinema, looking at Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*, the sex scenes in Jean-Luc Godard, Catherine Breillat and Souleymane Cissé.

**34 Lubitsch:** five of his silent masterpieces, and why they work.

**35 Panic and calm:** the psychology of fight or flight, and its opposite, and its depiction in story and cinema – Tsui Hark, Apichatpong, and the performances of Jack Lemmon.

**36 The human face:** how to look at it, film it, hide it, in the paintings of Rembrandt, the films of Rohmer, and the performances of Gong Li, Ruan Lingyu and Hideko Takamine.



*The students will be exhausted. But that's the point. Such learning should be an overload, a deluge, an assault on the emotions*

**37 Memory:** in Shakespeare, Sergio Leone, the masterpieces of Guru Dutt, Moufida Tlatli and Alain Resnais.

**38 Self:** should I put myself into my film? The movies of Agnès Varda, François Truffaut and John Ford, and the writing of Virginia Woolf.

**39 Literal:** how to avoid on-the-nose dialogue, story signposting and gong metaphors.

**40 Silent:** a week not speaking at all. "I tell stories not to speak, but to listen" – Rudiger Vogler in *Alice in the Cities*.

**41 Beginnings:** the great openings in cinema, and why they work – *Blue Velvet*, *Kaagaz Ke Phool*, *Psycho*, etc.

**42 Costume and story:** *In the Mood for Love*, *The Conformist*, *Jezebel*, *The Red Desert*, *Throne of Blood*.

**43 Recut:** re-editing great films that are flawed because of bad pacing or endings, or too many endings, or extraneous scenes – Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*, *Kwaidan*, the Brazilian film *Limite*, etc.

**44 Rescore:** great movie scenes given new sound

and music tracks – the shower scene in *Psycho*, the ending of Tarkovsky's *Mirror*, the opening of Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, the whole of *The Jungle Book*.

**45 Life:** Kierkegaard, De Beauvoir, Lao Tzu, Montaigne, George Eliot, Bentham, Clarice Lispector, Amartya Sen, Jesus Christ, Jung, Walter Benjamin, Joseph Brodsky, Merleau-Ponty.

**46 Love:** in the work of Samira Makhmalbaf, Joan Didion, Frank Borzage and Howard Hawks.

**47 Death and grief:** in *The Ballad of Narayama*, J-horror, *Amour*, *Three Colours Blue*, *The Babadook*, *Gravity*.

**48 Watch** Kieslowski's *Dekalog* and ten films directed by Stanley Donen, alternating one of each.

**49 The turning of the Earth:** the magic moments of the year. A recap of what we have learnt.

**50 Destroy:** the students burn their notes from the 50-week course, and write the themes and outline for next year's 50 weeks.

Phew. I'm tired just thinking that up, so the students would be exhausted studying it. I think. I hope. But that's the point. Such learning should be an overload, a deluge, an assault on the emotions, senses, values, skills. Maybe the above, and last month's 25, sound too otherworldly to you – and what would those who ratify educational courses think of it? – but it's good to do a sketch to keep in mind as you ride the rapids. ☺



DEVELOPMENT TALE

## KAJAKI: THE TRUE STORY



**Blood and sand:** the team behind *Kajaki* set out to capture an unfashionable soldier's-eye experience rarely seen in modern British depictions of war

Making a British war film that fights shy of polemic called for innovative funding and the ability to steal a march on the MoD

**By Charles Gant**

For screenwriter Tom Williams and director Paul Katis, the spark to make a modern British war movie came from a rather unlikely source: their work this past decade making corporate training films through their company Pukka Films. In 2010, they were asked to make one about workplace safety for the British Army. "A worryingly high proportion of military casualties are caused by people getting run over by tanks rather than being shot by the enemy," explains Williams.

Pukka's approach to its work is heavily research-based. "The training element is that much stronger if it comes from credible situations that they can identify with," says Williams. The pair met a large number of young soldiers, many of whom had served in Afghanistan and a spark was ignited. "Just this experience of meeting the boys and hearing the tales from the trenches, it made us think," he adds. "People aren't telling these stories on the big screen at the moment. Why not? And could we tell a modern British war story?"

Katis and Williams initially intended to enact

their usual research process, but then craft a fictional story. As the writer explains, "Nine times out of ten, the facts of a true story are going to be awkward for a film narrative or they're going to be very political, or they're going to be too big-budget or open-ended." It was while researching a story about the delivery of the turbine to the Kajaki Dam in Helmand province ("Can we do a convoy movie?") that the pair stumbled on another story at the same location, this time from 2006: a bunch of British soldiers caught in a minefield. It was highly contained. It had nothing to say about the rights and wrongs of the war in Afghanistan. It was about a bunch of guys rising to the challenge of a tough situation in which several lost limbs and one his life. It was, they decided, just what they needed: "It's neither a victory nor a defeat, it's not especially glorious or humiliating but there were human stories there that we could bring to life."

The Ministry of Defence had other ideas and for six months blocked any access to the still-serving soldiers – presumably cautious about a story that, while celebrating bravery, might raise questions about operational capability and the supply of vital equipment, from medical kits to radios and helicopters. But Williams was able to reach one key participant, who had left the army, and he also got hold of the 1,000-page Army Board of Enquiry report into the incident, with maps, timelines and multiple interviews (although

with many names redacted). A script draft based on this information persuaded the media liaison officer to give Williams proper access.

By the time this particular gatekeeper was rotated out and the MoD reverted to its original non-cooperative stance, it was too late: Williams had already met and extensively interviewed virtually all the soldiers who had been caught in the minefield that day. The only problem was that he now had a 150-page draft. "We were in danger of having too many perspectives because everybody remembers it with themselves in the centre of the action. We had to dial that back a bit, but I would stand by the fact that this is 95 per cent verbatim and chronologically accurate, with very little narrative or temporal compression. We're maybe breaking a few rules of screenwriting structure. Some script editors have done the whole 'Whose story is it?' thing. We would always default back to the truth over cleanliness or ease of experience for the audience."

When it came to moving forward with production, *Kajaki* proved a tough sell to the UK film industry. It was hard to point to the precedent of a successful British war film made in living memory – largely because there had barely been any. Films that celebrate soldier bravery or efficacy – *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), *Lone Survivor* (2013) – have been American. "They're more comfortable praising their heroes than the British are," notes Williams.



"Paul and I felt that there had been enough stories told about post-traumatic stress disorder or dodgy dossiers or the horrors of war or collateral damage, all of which are totally valid subjects to explore. But possibly the role of the individual soldier and the choices and sacrifices and struggles that they are making were being lost in the mix."

One problem was that the clock was ticking. In 2012, it was announced that British troops would be completing their withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of 2014, a date that then became the film's rapidly approaching target for UK release. The film's lack of a political agenda probably didn't endear it to the UK broadcaster film divisions or the BFI. "Had Paul wanted to make a more pointed political film that seemed to cast blame, then maybe some of the historic funding opportunities would have looked at it more closely," comments *Kajaki* executive producer Gareth Ellis-Unwin, a former assistant director for Katis who went on to establish a successful career as a line producer and producer, winning an Oscar for *The King's Speech*. "I also feel, rightly or wrongly, a lot of the more early development opportunities in the UK are geared towards the hipper, cooler, younger, fresher voices," he adds. There evidently wasn't a particular buzz about Williams, writer of teen-targeting comedy *Chalet Girl*, or Katis.

With the commercial sector showing few

*We felt there had been enough stories told about PTSD or dodgy dossiers or the horrors of war or collateral damage*

signs of biting – "It's a fairly brutal story, it doesn't exactly raise pound signs in financiers' eyes," says Williams – *Kajaki's* team decided to get creative, and aggressive. Cash for location scouting and other early expenses came via crowdfunding site Indiegogo. And by avoiding traditional investors, the production was able to raise funds as it went along, initially just for the shoot, and then for post-production. "We realised we needed to gather together a group of like-minded individuals with deep enough pockets that they could pretty much put this thing together outside of any traditional funding," says Ellis-Unwin.

The innovative model for *Kajaki* extends to the release strategy, which cuts out the distributor middleman by doing a deal directly with Vue Cinemas. Additional marketing muscle and a handy stamp of approval comes via military charities, such as Help for Heroes and Walking with the Wounded, which will earn ten per cent of any profits, helping *Kajaki* to target the UK's estimated 4.3 million veterans and soldiers. With the cash flowing directly back to the production from cinemas, Ellis-Unwin says, "I can say with my hand on my heart, our investors and the charities, who have been such a big part of this story from day one, will have a far-improved revenue stream coming to them than would have been afforded under a typical model." 📢

**i** *Kajaki: The True Story* is out now at UK cinemas and will be reviewed in a future issue

## THE NUMBERS MR. TURNER

By Charles Gant

Over the course of a 40-year big-screen career, Mike Leigh has emerged as a reliable draw for arthouse audiences, consistently landing around the £1m-£2m box-office range in the UK with all his recent films. And despite a bigger budget necessitated by a period setting, many felt that *Mr. Turner* would probably end up doing about the same – *Topsy-Turvy* (£1.2m) plus ticket-price inflation.

Such predictions proved wide – very wide – of the mark. Opening with a stunning £905,000 from 129 cinemas, and expanding to 383 venues by its third week of play, *Mr. Turner* has taken an impressive £4.36m after only 17 days, and looks likely to land in the £7m-£8m range by the end of its run: triple the amount of Leigh's previous biggest hit, *Vera Drake*.

The result is a felicitous outcome for UK distributor eOne, especially as it picked up the film almost by accident. "We acquired it when we bought [rival distributor] Momentum," eOne boss Alex Hamilton explains. "'Untitled Mike Leigh' was sitting in their portfolio. It's an unusual situation."

Having viewed the film at an early rough stage, eOne's confidence grew. "We thought the film would have commercial appeal," says Hamilton. "I'll be honest: we didn't know then it would have *quite* as much appeal as it's proven to have. But we did talk specifically that there was a Turner audience, a period audience, as well as a Mike Leigh audience. It's a film about one of Britain's great artists by one of Britain's great artists. Mike himself said this is not a film about people sitting by the stairs talking."

Knowing that Tate Britain's 'Late Turner' exhibition would provide extra profile, and encouraged by promotions with the likes of Foyles bookshops and the National Trust, Hamilton committed a bigger marketing spend – £1m – than has ever been allocated to a Leigh film, splashing out on a TV spot in *Downton Abbey*, for example. In so doing, eOne ignored any cautious voices whispering that *Mr. Turner's* lengthy



Brush with success: Timothy Spall in *Mr. Turner*

duration, lack of high-concept story hook, arcane language and grunting protagonist might prove challenging to audiences.

"The mistake we all can make," says Hamilton, "be it distributors, critics, industry experts – we always think we know what the audience wants. What the audience wants is not a fixed thing. We thought there was a real attraction to the older audience, who do read reviews but also might go to National Trust sites, who like Timothy Spall, have heard of Mike Leigh but may not necessarily have seen his films, and were aware of Turner as an artist."

The success of the film in regional multiplexes confirms that *Mr. Turner* has crossed over far beyond upscale urban arthouses. A rise in senior-discount tickets from below 40 per cent in week one to above 50 per cent in week two tells its own story.

Leigh – contrary, but hardly a snob – is reported to be encouraged by the outcome. "Mike and his producer Georgina [Lowe] are very pleased," says Hamilton. "I haven't met a filmmaker who doesn't want their film to be seen." 📢

### MIKE LEIGH AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Mr. Turner	2014	£4,357,230*
Vera Drake	2005	£2,377,598
Secrets & Lies	1996	£1,976,401
Another Year	2010	£1,866,672
Happy-Go-Lucky	2008	£1,663,763
Topsy-Turvy	2000	£1,177,542
All or Nothing	2002	£712,165
Life is Sweet	1990	£530,000
Career Girls	1997	£492,772
Naked	1993	£456,280

\* still on release, gross after 17 days



# 'A TIRELESS ENABLER'

## BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

The death of Chris Collins, an experienced and talented BFI Film Fund executive, is a devastating loss to the British film industry



By Ben Roberts

A facet of the Film Fund that distinguishes it from other international public film funds is that it's editorially driven.

Many funds make

awards based on the level of local production spend, or other points-based systems, but we are fortunate in the UK to have the Film Tax Relief (which follows a points- and spend-based test), allowing the Film Fund to make subjective decisions on projects with particular merits.

This means decisions are made not by panels or assessors, but by creative individuals with backgrounds in development and production, and, above all, a passion for and knowledge of film. Through the development process they become the champions and challengers of projects and filmmakers, and will enter into heated discussion with each other when settling on which projects will be taken through to production.

They study rushes, support and troubleshoot throughout the production, make notes on the filmmakers' cuts – sometimes helpful, sometimes not – offer more money when a filmmaker hasn't quite got the resources they need, and they will look on proudly on the red carpet when the film premieres, and wait nervously for reviews and box-office results when the film is finally released.

It's a quiet role, invisible to the untrained eye perhaps – maybe a name you will hear in a list of thanks on a stage at some point – but for many filmmakers these executives are their defender and friend, a sounding board, an alternative view.

We've all been dealt a devastating blow this month with the passing of Chris Collins – one of the most experienced of these BFI execs, and a man deeply loved and admired by those with whom he worked. Chris had been seriously unwell for much of the past year, but we were often amazed and delighted by his quiet tenacity, returning to the office fully-charged on several occasions and assuming a normal working day or as much as he could bear, getting on a bus to watch the cut of a film he couldn't afford to miss, getting on a plane to see cherished projects premiere in Cannes and Venice.

Chris was a producer before he joined the UK Film Council and subsequently the BFI. Battle-scarred but not battle-weary, he offered the filmmakers who he worked with a genuine understanding of the challenges of production, and he embraced the uncertainty of filmmaking with a confident, comforting, pragmatic shrug.

*The deference with which Chris Collins offered his opinions sometimes disguised how hugely significant they were*



Chris Collins (right) with Tom Hiddleston

I learned a lot from Chris about handing out public money when I joined the BFI – "It's not our money," he'd say – and if a funding decision was spinning forever like a penny, he'd most likely be the one to give it a flick. Independent filmmaking carries a million unknowns: in the financing, the production, the finished product, the festival reaction, the reviews, the audience. You can be paralysed by it, or you can roll with it. Chris fell firmly into the latter camp and Lottery funding being what it is – supporting someone to take a bit of a risk – he believed in trusting your instincts and getting the money out the door.

Of the many emails we've had over the last few weeks from filmmakers, producers and friends in the industry, a number of comments stood out as representative of Chris, and explain why he was the exemplar of his role:

"He understood what public support for filmmakers could be at its best. You came out of meetings with him feeling that you had a better sense of what you were trying to achieve and had been given ideas you could work with. That's a rare skill and I suspect his calm, ego-less manner meant that some people didn't realise what a creative force he was."

"Only recently I was remembering how his few well-chosen critical comments hit the bull's-eye. I am relieved at those that I heeded and somewhat regretful of those I didn't. The deference with which he offered his opinions sometimes disguised how hugely significant they were."

"He was the most superb and tireless enabler of other people – a very rare gift indeed."

I really only knew Chris from our time at the BFI. Unusually our paths hadn't crossed before, although I've realised since that a film for which I had tried and failed to acquire the UK distribution rights many years earlier – the wonderful *Tomorrow La Scala!* – was a film he had produced.

But I'm grateful to Chris for his wisdom and collegiate friendship in the past few years. I'll remember the five minutes we would often spend together in my office before a meeting – he was fastidiously punctual – ruminating on the highs and lows of the week, talking shop, putting out fires with jokes, before he'd look at his watch and then out to the office, asking "Is anyone planning on joining this meeting?" and we'd turn to the business at hand. @bfbfen



Donations in memory of Chris can be made to [www.dimblebycancercare.org](http://www.dimblebycancercare.org)

## IN PRODUCTION

● **Wang Bing**, the Chinese documentary filmmaker of the epic and highly acclaimed *West of the Tracks* is among the recipients this year of funding from Rotterdam International Film Festival's Hubert Bals Fund. His film *Shanghai Youth* is a documentary about rural Chinese who now work in the city's factories. The fund has granted a total of €180,000 (£144,000) to 14 films from nine countries.

● **Lenny Abrahamson** will follow *Frank* with *Room*, based on the novel by Irish author Emma Donoghue, who also adapted the screenplay. The film tells the story of a five-year-old boy named Jack, who believes that the room in which he lives is the whole world. Principal shooting has started at Pinewood, and the cast includes Brie Larson, Jacob Tremblay, Joan Allen and William H. Macy.

● **David O. Russell** is to reunite Jennifer Lawrence and Robert De Niro (who both starred in Russell's 2012 film *Silver Linings Playbook* and 2013's *American Hustle*) for *Joy*, a biopic about Joy Mangano, inventor of the Miracle Mop. The film starts shooting in February, aiming for a Christmas 2015 release date.

● **Oliver Stone** is to direct a feature about Edward Snowden. Based on Luke Harding's *The Snowden Files: The Inside Story of the World's Most Wanted Man* and Anatoly Kucherena's *Time of the Octopus*, the film will chronicle Snowden's flight from the US to Hong Kong. Stone's film will reportedly star Joseph Gordon-Levitt as Snowden and Shailene Woodley as his girlfriend Lindsay Mills.

● **Steve McQueen** is reportedly readying a film about Paul Robeson. "His life and legacy was the film I wanted to make the second after *Hunger*," McQueen has said. "But I didn't have the power, I didn't have the juice." McQueen has already made Robeson the subject of a previous artwork, *End Credits* (2012).

● **Olivier Assayas** (below) has been forced to cancel production of his feature *Idol's Eye*, a gangster picture based on a 2007 *Playboy* article 'Boosting the Big Tuna', which was to have starred Robert Pattinson, Robert De Niro and Rachel Weisz. In a statement, the film's production company, Benaroya Pictures, said: "Due to the criteria for financing not being met by producers, Benaroya Pictures has formally decided to discontinue financing the motion picture titled *Idol's Eye*." The film would have been Assayas's first Hollywood production.





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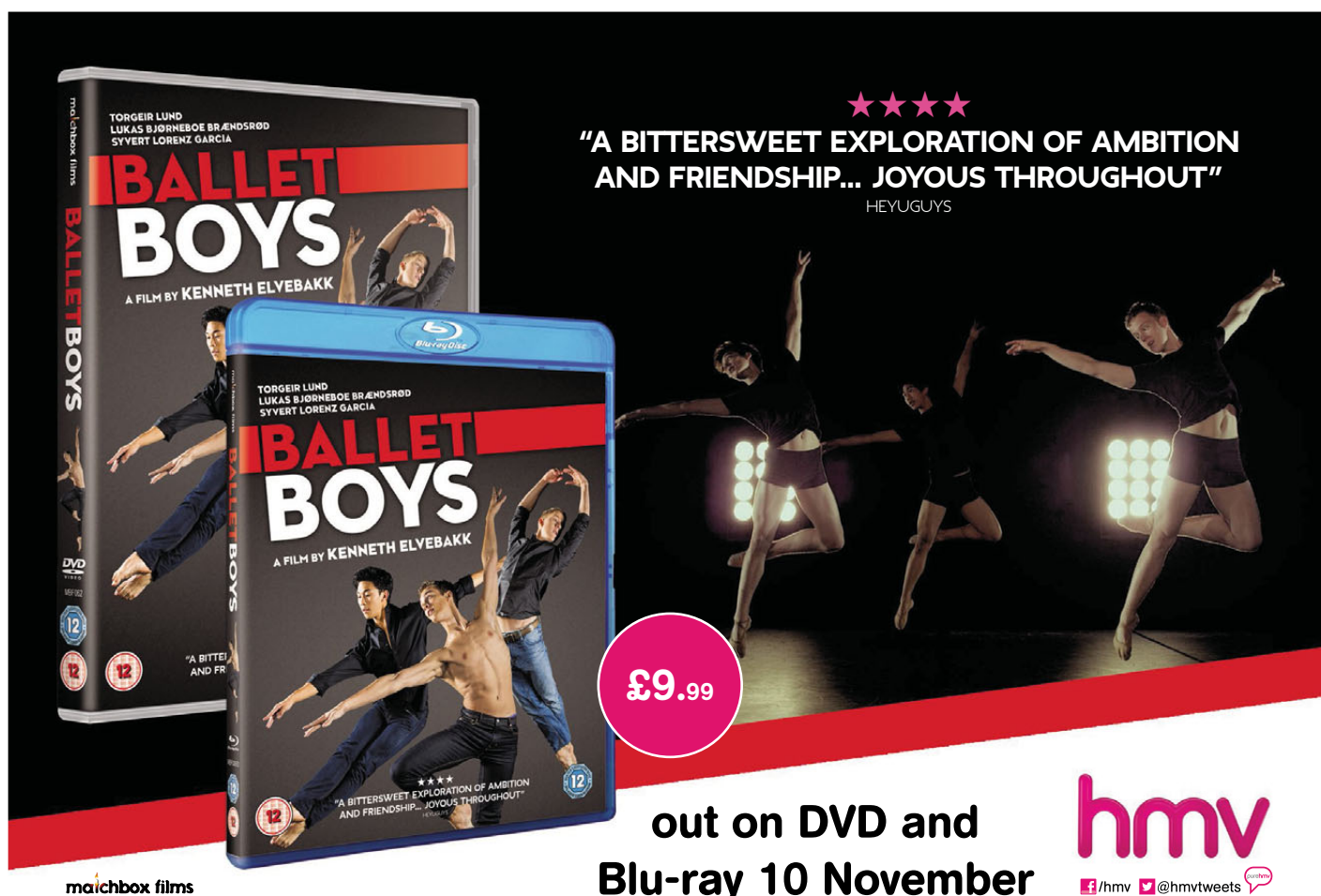
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# THE EDUCATORS

With the London Film School's move to a new site imminent, its director Jane Roscoe looks forward to a new chapter in its history

**By Geoffrey Macnab**

The London Film School, "the oldest-established international school of film technique in the world", as it boasts on its website, is soon to move home. In 2017, the LFS, which was founded in 1956, will leave its current site in a converted Covent Garden brewery and head to new premises at the Barbican. Overseeing the relocation is the school's newly appointed director, Jane Roscoe, who took over in August following the departure of Ben Gibson after 14 years at the helm.

"We are looking at a journey which will take from two to two and a half years," Roscoe says of the timing of the switch to the Barbican. "We have signed off on the first stage of the architecture plans and we are in that process of the lease signing at the moment."

Roscoe, an academic and broadcaster who launched the Centre for Screen Studies and Research at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, knew of the Barbican plans before she applied for the job. "Any sort of move on this scale certainly is a little scary," she says. "It is ambitious and so it should be scary. It was definitely part of the appeal of the job."

The LFS director suggests that setting up at the Barbican isn't just a case of changing buildings and securing a little more space for the students. It will mark a new chapter in the school's life as the LFS turns 60. "It is really about a new configuration for the school, a new way to be."

The hope is that the school, in an emerging cultural hub in the City of London, will benefit from its new neighbours (among them the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the Barbican Centre itself and the digital creatives in nearby Old Street). But Roscoe acknowledges that it is an ongoing project and there is still fundraising to be done: "It is going to cost a lot of money and it is ambitious. It's not a matter of, 'Hey, in two-and-a-half years' time, we are at the new building' and that's the end of story."

Mike Leigh (the school's current chairman) and Michael Mann probably rank as the most illustrious graduates in the LFS's history but there is a stream of current and former students picking up prizes at major film festivals. In a recent *Hollywood Reporter* poll, the LFS was voted the world's sixth-best international film school.

Even so, these are tricky times. The UK government's clampdown on foreign students has made it harder for some would-be LFS attendees to get visas. The courses aren't cheap either. According to the LFS website, the total cost of the six-term, two-year MA filmmaking course is a hefty £51,606 (although bursaries and scholarships are available).

"Any education these days is very expensive. The course we offer is both very intensive and rich with opportunities for making actual films. There is a limit to how much we can cut costs to deliver such a high-quality course," Roscoe says.



**Relocation, relocation: the LFS will move to the Barbican from its current Covent Garden site in 2017**

At present, around 75 per cent of the school's intake are international students but Roscoe hopes to increase the number of Brits.

"This year, we've got a very healthy intake of international students," Roscoe says. "We've been able to help many of them secure their visas and make their journey as smooth as possible. Of course, when you have such an international cohort of students, you are a little bit at the mercy of government regulations on visas, immigration and, of course, the fluctuation of currencies."

Some perceive the LFS as less industry-oriented than the National Film And Television School (though alongside the courses on screenwriting and filmmaking, there is now an MA in international film business led by former journalist and sales agent Angus Finney). Roscoe suggests there is an amicable rivalry between the two establishments.

"We have a lot in common. The big picture is about making sure the UK screen industry is lively, fresh and exciting," she says. "We are in the business of nurturing the next generation to sustain that industry. At many levels, we are fighting for the same things. It is important that film be recognised as a significant cultural form and that we recognise the screen industry brings a lot of money into the UK – we are part of that business."


While the LFS and NFTVS still come together to lobby for common goals, Roscoe points out they are very different institutions. "The LFS is built around the spirit of independent filmmaking. We're there to push the boundaries,

to be a little more experimental, to be more innovative – and maybe just to nudge the NFTVS and say occasionally, 'Come on, we're pushing you, we're pushing you!'"

Roscoe pays tribute to the support of Leigh: "It is a real joy to have a chairman of the board of governors who is so engaged and passionate about the school."

Ask the LFS director how she compares British attitudes to film education with those she encountered in Australia and New Zealand and she will deflect the question. "I would probably have answered that differently at different times over the last 20 years," she says. "It is partly to do with who is in power in the government. Certainly in Australia at the moment it's a very tough environment for the arts and everyone is feeling the pressure. The argument that film is an important part of the cultural remit of a nation – at times it has been very hard to sustain that argument in places like Australia. Here [in the UK] the arguments get played out in different ways. It is still a battle but there is much more recognition of the importance of film. Screen culture more generally is taken more seriously."

As an academic, Roscoe has written widely on television culture. The LFS already offers a course geared toward TV drama, 'Serial eyes', run in conjunction with the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB) and the National Film School of Denmark. However, the new LFS boss makes it clear that there are no plans to shift the school's activities away from film.

"I don't think there's a name change on the cards," Roscoe says, dismissing the idea the LFS might turn into the LFTVS. "No, it's the London Film School and the focus is definitely on film but, in a broader context, we want students who are able to take their content to other platforms. It's not a question of ignoring those other platforms – but we start with film." 

*London Film School courses aren't cheap – the total cost of the six-term, two-year MA in filmmaking is a hefty £51,606*



# THE HORIZONTAL WONG KAR WAI

*Wong Kar Wai's respect for traditional martial arts is firmly in evidence in his vividly authentic 'The Grandmaster', which explores the life of the legendary wing chun teacher Ip Man. But does his narrative lose its way in the battle between style and substance?*

**By Tony Rayns**

There are several different cuts of *The Grandmaster* (*Yidai Zongshi*, 2013), but they all begin with the same scene – or rather scenes, since actually two different scenes are intercut. The longer and more florid of the two shows a night fight in torrential rain between Ip Man (Tony Leung) and an unidentified gang; it takes place in a gated courtyard, and ends only when a particularly macho thug has crashed through an upper-floor window to take on Ip alone. After they've crushed a rickshaw between them Ip apparently breaks the guy's leg with a kick and then punches him in the chest with enough force to send him flying; his weight brings down one of the huge wrought-iron gates. A caption in two versions of the film sets the scene in Foshan (Guangdong, South China) in 1936. This fight is briefly interrupted by two shots which glide around Ip Man as he chats with friends in a well-lit interior, evidently recollecting that very fight in the rain; now dry, he's wearing the same white boater he keeps on his head throughout the fight. He speaks the lines which will be recapitulated at the end of the film:

"Don't tell me how well you fight, or how great your teacher is, or brag about your style. Kung fu. Two words. Horizontal. Vertical. Make a mistake: horizontal. Stay standing and you win. Isn't that right?"

The horizontal/vertical motif is echoed in the main title caption, written from right-to-left – a mannered retro touch – and presented in an ugly mixture of handwritten and printed Chinese characters. The initial 'Yi' is presented as a single horizontal brushstroke, a visual slash. And the final 'Shi', also handwritten,











*The film is far more elegiac than dramatic, but insofar as it occasionally sparks into life its drama is largely predicated on clashes between opposing schools of martial artistry*

has its left-side vertical stroke exaggerated to suggest a standing figure at the left edge of the screen.

Anyone who slogs through the tediously conventional 'extras' on any of the DVD editions of the film will find copious footage of Wong Kar Wai – he nowadays prefers to write his name in English without the usual hyphen – schlepping around China on research trips, meeting a range of elderly masters of the main martial-arts schools. (They're so elderly that two of them have actually died since the footage was shot.) Many of them lavishly praise Wong for going back to the roots of 'authentic' martial arts and for respecting its traditions – or at least, the 20th-century ones – in his film. The deliberately mismatched characters of the main title are presumably intended to symbolise the various conflicting schools. The film is far more elegiac than dramatic, but insofar as it occasionally sparks into dramatic life its drama is largely predicated on clashes between opposing schools of martial artistry. Self-evidently, though, Ip's wry 'horizontal/vertical' comment trumps all the emphasis on particular traditions. It's the martial-arts equivalent of Deng Xiaoping's famous revision of communist ideology: "It doesn't matter if a cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice."

In all its different cuts, including the 108-minute Weinstein version now belatedly released in Britain, the film is so lacunary and defocused that it's hard to define exactly what it's doing, or why. Its overall frame is Ip Man's life. In a lengthy voiceover near the start, he intro-

duces himself as the son of a prosperous Foshan trader and as a boy who began training in martial arts at the age of seven. (His teacher Chan Wah-Shun is played in a flashback cameo by the film's martial-arts choreographer Yuen Woo-Ping, elsewhere conspicuously absent from the 'making of' footage.) Thanks to his well-to-do family, Ip explains, he didn't need to earn a living; he likens his first 40 years to the springtime of his life, and notes that spring abruptly turned to winter when the Japanese army invaded Foshan in 1938. By then he was happily married to Cheung Wing-Sing (played by Korean actress Song Hyekyo, who is given next to no dialogue) and had two daughters, both of whom died in the war. The film cuts directly from Ip's wartime privations to Hong Kong in 1950, where he looks for employment as a martial-arts teacher. His wife, meanwhile, is somewhere in northern China and is seen again only in a nostalgic flashback to happier times. In the closing scenes, some time before his death in 1972, Ip is teaching the *wing chun* style to classes in Hong Kong, but always drifting off in reveries. The film doesn't belabour the point, but the casting of a lookalike shows that Ip's youngest pupil was Bruce Lee.

Despite its rather clunky interpolation of history lessons in voiceovers, captions and snatches of newsreel, the film is nothing like a conventional biopic. Unexpected emphases and narrative digressions push it into entirely other directions, with Wong's predilection for abstract visuals – out-of-focus lights and decors,





**ACTION STATION**  
Zhang Ziyi, who plays Gong Er in *The Grandmaster* (above), undertook a year of serious martial-arts training alongside her co-star Tony Leung in order to gain an insight into the life and philosophy of a martial artist

dispersed reflections in puddles and so on, enhanced by his familiar battery of slow-mo and gliding camera effects – serving to paper over the cracks. The most substantial element cutting against the grain of Ip's biography is the story of Gong Er (Zhang Ziyi), daughter of the Manchurian grandmaster Gong Yutian, who unified two schools of martial arts. Gong and Ip fall in love with each other when they fight a decorous duel in Foshan's most palatial brothel but they can never be together – he because he's already married, she because she takes a solemn Buddhist vow not to marry, have children or pass on her skills so that she can devote herself to her duty to avenge her father, killed by his own nominated successor, the Japanese collaborator Ma San.

Gong's considerable backstory occupies a large chunk of the running time, what with her father's funeral, her struggle to be accepted by Wudang Clan elders as a legitimate successor, her vengeful brushes with Ma San, her eventual defeat of Ma San on a railway platform in Manchuria (while the longest steam-train since the one in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* rockets past behind them), and her final decline into opium addiction in Hong Kong. Her chaste, yearning love affair with Ip gives the film much of its Wong Kar Wai flavour, echoing as it does the doomed liaisons in *Ashes of Time* (1994), *In the Mood for Love* (2000), *2046* (2004) and the rest. At least Tony Leung isn't required to coldly reject Zhang Ziyi's passion this time, as he was in *2046* and as Leslie Cheung rejected Maggie Cheung back in *Days of Being Wild* (1990). And at least Gong Er isn't another Su Lizhen, the name that deluded, unloved women in Wong Kar Wai movies usually go by. But most of what she does in the film has little or nothing to do with Ip Man.

Even more seemingly extraneous is the 'story' of Yi Xiantian, known as 'Razor' (Chang Chen, getting more of a look-in this time than he did in *2046*). He's first seen with bloodied hands as a Kuomintang agent in Japanese-occupied Manchuria; Gong Er impulsively shields him from an identity check on a train by pretending to be his wife. He then pops up again in scenes set in early-1950s Hong Kong, putting his weapon of choice to peacetime use by opening a barber shop and later setting up in business as a teacher of *bajiquan* martial arts. He meets Ip Man only in the Weinstein cut of the film, although the 'making of' footage offers Europeans and East Asians a glimpse of him opening his cut-throat razor to challenge Ip to their duel. It seems unlikely that the character was ever integral to the central narrative, entertaining as his appearances are; his scenes are inescapably reminiscent of Tony Leung's unexplained cameo in the coda to *Days of Being Wild*. Of course, the fact that Chang Chen (like Tony Leung) is represented by Wong's talent agency Project House could have some bearing on Razor's rather marginal survival in the film as released.

One way to account for the film's digressive sprawl would be to suggest that its real subject is not Ip Man's biography but rather the chasm between a reverential approach to martial-arts traditions and the kind of brute force implied by Ip's contention that nothing matters except whether you end up horizontal or vertical. That way Gong Er's story would represent tradition – it exalts the notion of distinctive styles of combat, stresses hierarchical order and quasi-Buddhist solemnity, and deplores dishonourable behaviour and treachery – while Razor's story would represent the gangster's way of parlaying

martial expertise into winning by any means necessary, with Ip Man positioned somewhere between the two poles.

Interestingly, though, that chasm is precisely echoed in Wong Kar Wai's own position as an independent filmmaker in a rapidly changing Chinese film culture. You could see him as an Ip Man himself, caught between the demands of the market (kung fu action!) and the 'art-house' sensibility which has won him regular berths in the major European film festivals. Wong started out as a writer/script-doctor in the mid-1980s heyday of the Hong Kong film industry, noted for his work on martial-arts fantasies (*Saviour of the Soul*, 1991) and gangster movies (*Final Victory*, 1987). But he soon found himself impatient with the demands of genre: it was no surprise that his own debut feature *As Tears Go By* (1988) was a gangster movie in the vein of *Mean Streets*, since Scorsese seemed to offer a way out of genre traps. More seriously, Wong found himself losing faith in his own ability to come up with fully formed scripts in advance of filming. His second feature *Days of Being Wild* was notoriously shot in fits and starts over many months, with Wong secluding himself in purdah every few days to come up with new structures, storylines and scenes. He has pursued this costly and wasteful *modus operandi* ever since – except in the case of his two 'quickies', *Chungking Express* (1994) and *The Hand* (2005, Wong's episode in *Eros*), which are, as it happens, his most organic and coherent films.

Around 15 years ago, while he was tinkering with the cut of *In the Mood for Love* after its Cannes premiere (and, he said, intending to plunge straight into production of *2046*), Wong told me of his wish to change. He was specifically exercised by the number of "Wong Kar Wai imitators" out there, but I took him to mean too that he wanted to organise his own productions more cost-effectively. His survival as an independent with his own production company was on the line: he'd tried to boost Jet Tone's cash-flow by marketing collectibles and relaunching films by Jeff Lau and Eric Kot which he'd produced, and even considered subletting part of his office. In the event, *2046* turned out to be a film driven by the idea of change, but incapable of breaking away from the old Wong Kar Wai obsessions. At one level it even played as a direct sequel to *In the Mood for Love*, with Tony Leung's character moving back to 1960s Hong Kong from Singapore and plying a new trade as writer of schlocky martial-arts fantasies for a trashy newspaper.

Following the flops of *My Blueberry Nights* (2007) and *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), Wong needed *The Grandmaster* to restore both his commercial fortunes and his critical reputation. The various versions of the film that he's released have certainly delivered the bucks: the estimated worldwide gross to date is some \$64m, most of it coming from the China market, which makes it his biggest commercial hit. But the critical response has been mixed, at best, and many have complained about the lack of narrative focus and the incomplete storylines. As the obsessive recutting suggests, it's another of his 'provisional' films, more process than finished work. He's announced *The Ferryman* as his next project (it's an adaptation of a story published on the internet by Zhang Jiajia) – another story of an illicit romance. Will it leave him standing tall or flat on his back? ☹



**The Grandmaster is released in UK cinemas on 5 December and is reviewed on page 76**



## IN THE MOOD FOR KUNG FU

*Wong Kar Wai explains his lifelong fascination with martial arts, why he was determined to bring a new realism to the genre, and why quality films, like the finest stews, should never be made in a hurry*

**James Bell:** There have been numerous films made about Ip Man, by Wilson Yip, Herman Yau and others. Did you feel they had failed to capture some aspect that your own approach would achieve?

**Wong Kar Wai:** Those films were interesting interpretations of the Ip Man legend, dealing with fragments of his life, and were effective in their own right. However, my goal was always to explore the man behind the legend and the philosophy of Chinese martial arts.

In the long history of martial arts, there have been many great fighters, but few who could be called a grandmaster. Ip Man is one such as he has his own legacy. It's difficult to understand Ip Man, the grandmaster, without learning about the times in which he lived.

He was born to a rich family who did import and export business. He was not a typical martial-arts artist. He didn't work a day in his life until he was 40. He lost everything during the war.

He arrived in Hong Kong totally broke and had to rebuild his life from scratch. What supported him through this hardship was his code of honour as a martial-arts artist, and his vision.

Because of him and his students, *wing chun* became the most popular martial-arts form throughout the world. Through his story I was given an opportunity to capture the most critical period of the Chinese martial-arts movement of the last century. To me, *The Grandmaster* is not just a film about Ip Man, it's a 'once upon a time' of kung fu.

**JB:** What's your relationship with martial arts? Is it a form you studied from afar, via movies, or have you ever practised yourself?

**WKW:** There's a scene in *The Grandmaster* in which a little kid appears at the school and tries to peek inside. He's supposed to be Bruce Lee, but that could've been me. When I was a kid, martial arts were extremely popular in Hong Kong. They were everywhere: movies, TV shows, radio programmes and novellas.

I grew up in a street with many martial-arts schools, run by masters from different regions of China. Many of them came to Hong Kong between the wars, following a similar journey to Ip Man. In those



Wong Kar Wai: 'The Grandmaster was my way of getting closer to martial arts'

days, martial arts were rarely practised in public. Schools like these were full of mysteries and legends. I was fascinated by that world. That was as close as I could get to kung fu, and I wanted to get closer.

During my research, a master I met compared fighting to kissing. He explained that to be a capable martial artist, one needs three qualities: physical strength, technique and, most of all, courage as there is a physical intimacy involved when you are fighting someone. You can't be afraid to get close and make your move. *The Grandmaster* was my way of getting closer to martial arts.

**JB:** Were you a particular fan of kung fu films in your youth? *Ashes of Time* fits into a tradition of *wuxia* films – do you see *The Grandmaster* as an equivalent for the kung fu film tradition?

**WKW:** People often ask me how long I researched for *The Grandmaster*: it was about seven years on the road for interviews and 30 years of watching kung fu films.

*Ashes of Time* features a highly romanticised

version of *wuxia* whereas *The Grandmaster* is much more realistic and closer to the *wushu* tradition. The Shaw Brothers – particularly the ones directed by Lau Kar-Leung – and Bruce Lee films were my reference points when it came to staging the fight scenes.

**JB:** How important was it that Tony Leung, Zhang Ziyi and other stars were able to perform the *wing chun* moves convincingly, and how much could editing and close-ups be used to disguise the limitations in their technique?

**WKW:** Tony and Ziyi went through a year of serious martial-arts training. There's a saying in martial arts that "it takes you three years to become a beginner". Although I never expected them to become kung fu masters in a year, the training was important because it gave them an insight into the life and philosophy of a martial artist. When Tony and Ziyi are fighting in the film, it is really them. That's why Tony broke his arm twice during the shoot.

As our intention was to make the fight



scenes as authentic as possible, all the action scenes were carefully choreographed to capture the essence of the individual schools. In fact some of these moves have never been shown before. That explains the close-ups. They were not for the purpose of covering their limitations, but to highlight the essence of their movements.

**JB: Speaking of choreography, can you describe what it was like to work with Yuen Woo-Ping on the fight scenes? He has a legendary status.**

**WKW:** Yuen Woo-Ping comes from a family of martial artists. Both he and his father were trained in the Beijing opera, which includes extensive martial-arts instruction for a number of years. In other words, Woo-Ping lives and breathes kung fu. We both insisted on representing the different fighting styles in an authentic way. Similar to how Bruce Lee approached his fight scenes, we wanted real martial arts to be featured in *The Grandmaster*, not movie martial arts. One of our goals in making the film was to represent these styles in a real and honest way.

**JB: How have digital effects altered the filmmaking process for you?**

**WKW:** Some people call me one of the few surviving 35mm directors, as most of my films were shot on 35mm. As we normally work with modest budgets, I don't use many digital effects as most of the time it is very costly. I always find the sound of film rolling in a magazine is one of the most beautiful sounds in the world, and I still do. I would be happy to remain analogue if I could, but I don't reject digital effects at all, because they are a tool for a filmmaker.

There is only one scene in *The Grandmaster* that relied heavily on digital effects and it's the fight scene at the train station, as to do it practically would have been too dangerous for the actors. In a time without digital effects, we would have had to have shot it like Buster Keaton, at a real train station.

Ninety-nine per cent of the film was shot entirely on 35mm. We only used a Phantom High Speed Camera for the slow-motion shots because that camera runs at 1,000 frames per second and that was the only way to capture those movements.

**JB: Were there any fight sequences that were particularly difficult to achieve?**

**WKW:** I enjoyed shooting all the fight sequences in the film, but one of the more challenging scenes was the showdown between Tony and the *baguazhang* master inside the teahouse. The master was played by Zhao Benshan, who is the most popular comedian in China. He's not a trained martial artist and prior to filming, he had just had major brain surgery so he was unable to physically exert himself. I had to find a way to demonstrate the character's skill without getting into an elaborate



**American hustle: Wong Kar Wai on the set of *My Blueberry Nights* with Natalie Portman**

fight scene. I would call it 'In the Mood for Kung Fu' and it is very satisfying.

**JB: Why did you select Philippe Le Sourd as your DP? Did his approach differ from other DPs you've worked with?**

**WKW:** I've been very lucky to have worked with a few great cinematographers, and Philippe is one of them. I knew him for a number of years while shooting commercials together. At that stage he hadn't shot a feature, nor did he have any experience in Chinese martial arts. I decided to work with him on this film because I wanted *The Grandmaster* to have a different look and to make a martial-arts movie with a fresh eye, which Philippe delivered. He brought his own unique approach to the film.

During our preps, Philippe was curious about my collaboration with Chris Doyle [who shot seven features with Wong, including *In the Mood for Love*] and thought that was a lot to live up to. I explained to him that Chris, besides being a great cinematographer, as he is, is also a good dancer; not only that, he is able to dance with the camera, the actors, but most importantly to dance with me, as ours is a very intimate collaboration. Somehow, Philippe took my metaphor too literally and later signed up for a tango class with his wife.

**JB: Did you have to present Chinese authorities with a completed script to sanction? Does the finished film at all resemble that initial script?**

*I always find the sound of film rolling in a magazine is one of the most beautiful sounds in the world. I would be happy to remain analogue if I could*

**WKW:** I was lucky to collaborate with two great writers on this film [Jingzhi Zou and Haofeng Xu], and we presented our script to the Film Bureau before principal shooting. We remained faithful to the story except for a few technical changes.

**JB: Looking back, what did you learn from making a movie [*My Blueberry Nights*, 2007] in the US?**

**WKW:** I didn't feel much of a difference between shooting a film in Hong Kong or in America, regardless of the differences in our working systems. I was afraid there might be a language barrier when it came to working with an American crew. Thankfully, in the world of filmmaking, there is one common language. Perhaps the most important lesson I learned was that you must break for lunch on time or it will cost you a fortune.

**JB: In the light of the extended production period on *The Grandmaster*, would you prefer to return to the fast methods of your earlier films? Could you still make a film as quickly as you did then?**

**WKW:** It really depends on the type of film you're making and the subject matter. It's like in cooking where it takes hours to make a stew and only a few minutes to fry something.

**JB: Is there a challenge for you today in meeting the demands of the new Chinese movie audiences, and also maintaining your international audience?**

**WKW:** There is not much of a difference between the new Chinese movie audience and the international audience. Films such as *Transformers 4* have proved this already. As a filmmaker, we don't make films for one specific audience. We make films for audiences, irrespective of their countries of origin or languages, with universal values, such as family, honour and love. ☺



## THE BIRTH OF A LEGEND

*'The Grandmaster' sits in a tradition of kung fu movies showcasing genuine fighting techniques alongside the fictional exploits of real-life historical martial-arts masters like Ip Man*

By Leon Hunt

While 'martial arthouse' films by Chinese auteur directors are nothing new, *The Grandmaster* is something unique – an arthouse kung fu film. The more upmarket *wuxia pian*, with its romantic sweep, grand spectacle and seemingly more egalitarian attitudes towards gender, has usually represented 'quality' Chinese martial-arts cinema on the international stage. This was true even before *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) created the blueprint for the *wuxia* blockbuster – it started with the 1975 Cannes showing of King Hu's epic *A Touch of Zen* (1971), often seen as the classy antithesis to the grindhouse thrills of the kung fu craze.

The distinction between *wuxia* and kung fu is a permeable one at best, but *The Grandmaster* contains two ingredients that align it with the latter genre. First, there's the use (albeit with considerable artistic licence) of genuine styles of Chinese martial arts as opposed to the more fanciful techniques that tend to characterise *wuxia pian*. The film's narrative specifies not only Ip Man's signature *wing chun*, but the 'internal' styles of the Gong family (Gong Er practises the 64 hands of *baguazhang*, villainous Ma San uses *xingyi*) and the *bajiquan* of Chang Chen's Razor character. Secondly, a sub-cycle of kung fu films deals with the fictionalised exploits of real-life historical martial-arts masters – Ip Man joins the likes of Huo Yuanjia (*Fist of Fury*, *Legend of a Fighter*, *Fearless*), Leung Jan (*Warriors Two*, *The Prodigal Son*), and the prototype for this kind of figure, the southern Chinese legend Wong Fei-Hung.

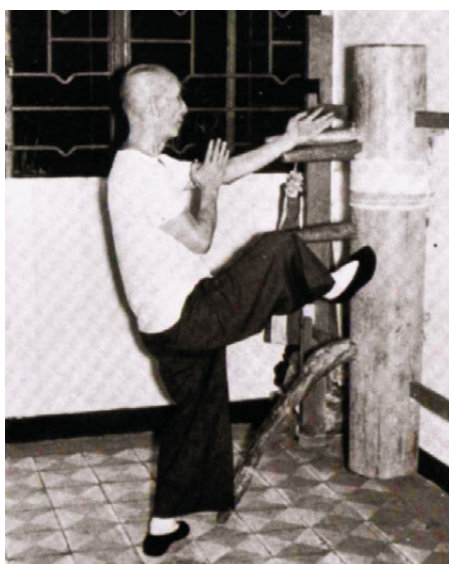
Like Ip, Wong was a resident of Foshan in Guangdong province, a town closely associated with the *hung gar* and *wing chun* styles of Chinese boxing. He made the transition to action hero in pulp novels and, from the late 1940s, in a long series of Cantonese quickies starring Kwan Tak-Hing. Jet Li would provide his modern incarnation in Tsui Hark's *Once upon a Time in China* series, but the role has also been played by Jackie Chan, Gordon Liu and others over the years. Wong is a firm but kindly Confucian with superlative fighting skills (mainly in the *hung gar* style), but it was the vaguer details of his life that created a space for countless



Brute force: Sammo Hung (right) in *Warriors Two* (1978), which he also directed

adventures to be imagined. In the Tsui Hark/Jet Li films, he takes on Western slavers, the Boxer rebellion, and even comes to the defence of the founding father of modern China, Sun Yat-Sen. In most recent Ip Man films, the hero is presented as a variation on Wong – "I thought everyone would be Wong Fei-Hung here," says one heavy scornfully of the local fighters in *Ip Man* (2008) before meeting Foshan's current reigning hero.

In the 1970s, Hong Kong martial-arts cinema's preoccupation with authenticity (which also determined the skills required for kung fu stardom, from Bruce Lee to Donnie Yen) paved the way for a flood of films about individual fighting styles, such as the *hung gar*-themed films Lau Kar-Leung made at Shaw Brothers. "It's authentic, it's clearly shown!" claims the trailer for *Warriors Two* (1978), one of two films Sammo Hung made at Golden Harvest about an earlier *wing chun* grandmaster from Foshan, Leung Jan.



Alive and kicking: Ip Man with his training dummy

Hung would return to *wing chun* for the two Donnie Yen *Ip Man* films, choreographing both and playing a supporting role as a rival *hung gar* master in the second. With its economical, low-kicking, close-contact style – its principle being that the shortest distance between two objects is a straight line – *wing chun* risks being a bit of a bore on screen, but fight choreographers have found ingenious ways of spicing it up, such as Yuen Woo-Ping's wirework flourishes or Donnie Yen's accelerated face-pummelling. No *wing chun* movie is complete without a scene involving the signature wooden training dummy (*Ip Man* and *The Grandmaster* use similar scenes of Ip abandoning the device to represent kung fu's impotence in the face of Japanese military aggression). *Wing chun* in popular culture is essentially the story of four people – Yim Wing Chun (the pupil of the Buddhist nun Ng Mui, who developed the *wing chun* style and named it after her), Leung Jan, Ip Man and Bruce Lee. The Ng Mui/Yim Wing Chun pairing provides a notable exception to the masculinism that tends to characterise the kung fu film. But it must be said that this narrative has fared less well on screen than those of male *wing chun* heroes. "Go and get married" is the rather surprising advice Ng gives to Wing Chun in Yuen Woo-Ping's *Wing Chun* (1994) after training her to be a superlative fighter – the legend has her learning kung fu to avoid a forced marriage to a local warlord, who tries to steal her from her true love. But it's hard to argue with the film's casting – 60s swordplay queen (and later *Crouching Tiger* villain) Cheng Pei-Pei is Ng Mui, with Michelle Yeoh as the eponymous heroine (and Donnie Yen as her love interest). It isn't a struggle to imagine Zhang Ziyi as a modern Yim Wing Chun, and *The Grandmaster's* focus on her fictional character Gong Er is



a reminder of how women are sometimes erased from the kung fu grand narrative.

Both films about Leung Jan (namechecked as an illustrious predecessor in *The Grandmaster*) take their cue from previous cinematic representations of Wong Fei-Hung. In *Warriors Two* he's the mature patriarch, while *The Prodigal Son* (1981) shows him as callow and untrained (like Jackie Chan's mischievous Wong in *Drunken Master*), paving the way for his historic meeting with teachers Leung Yee-Tai (an opera performer specialising in female roles) and Wong Wah-Bo.

If it has taken some time for Ip Man to be promoted to movie action hero, that's probably the result of him being overshadowed by his most famous pupil – Bruce Lee, who used *wing chun* as the basis for his own hybrid *Jeet Kune Do* fighting style. Prior to 2008, the cinematic Ip was confined to Bruce Lee biopics, including the Hollywood film *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* (1993) and a Chinese mainland TV series in 2008. His role in these films is to facilitate a legend, not to be one, but that was to change. The phenomenon of 'Ip Man fever' – which gave the kung fu film a new lease of life and cemented the leading man status of the talented Donnie Yen – could be attributed to a renewal of interest in Bruce Lee (particularly on the mainland – the Bruce Lee TV series was made the same year as the first *Ip Man*). But *The Grandmaster* makes no mention of Bruce Lee – Wong Kar Wai seems more interested in Master Ip as one of his émigré heroes, transplanted from Foshan to a Hong Kong that hasn't quite taken shape yet, and bringing *wing chun* with him. A filmmaker of Wong's stature announcing an Ip Man project, subsequently delayed by Tony Leung being injured in training, also played its part in bringing the *wing chun* master back into popular consciousness. By the time *The Grandmaster* was released, Donnie Yen had played the role twice, with his *Ip Man 2* (2010) being followed by a prequel *The Legend Is Born: Ip Man* (2010), starring Dennis To as a younger Ip, before Anthony Wong played an older version in *Ip Man: The Final Fight* (2013). This wasn't quite the flood it might have been in Hong Kong cinema's production-line days, but it suggested that Ip had stepped into Wong Fei-Hung's shoes. Moreover, *Ip Man 3* is currently in preparation for a 2015 3D release, with Yen returning to his most popular role, and the training of Bruce Lee apparently more of a narrative focus.

Lee is never far away in the Donnie Yen Ip Man films. The first *Ip Man* starts out like a Wong Fei-Hung film with its nostalgic evocation of Foshan's kung fu schools, lion dances and tea drinking, friendly challenge matches and occasionally a more serious one with a stranger in town trying to make a



Fist of fury: Donnie Yen in Wilson Yip's *Ip Man* (2008)

*Prior to 2008, Ip Man was confined to Bruce Lee biopics. His role in these films is to facilitate a legend, not to be one*

reputation for himself. But when the Japanese invade, the film effectively turns into *Fist of Fury* (1972), with Ip engaging in bone-crunching duels with multiple karate experts or facing off with a Japanese general while dressed like Bruce Lee's character Chen Zhen. The end credits include a montage of stills of the real Ip and Lee together as an illustration of its titular hero's continuing legacy. *Ip Man 2* relocates to Hong Kong and replaces evil Japanese with villainous Brits, putting *wing chun* in the ring with an arrogant English boxer called Twister. But its highlight is the final scene in which Ip meets a young Bruce Lee for the first time, a cocky adolescent with all those familiar mannerisms already in place.

When the dust has settled, there's a fascinating (if possibly divisive) double-bill waiting to be programmed of *Ip Man* and *The Grandmaster*. The differences are obvious enough – one glance at IMDb user reviews confirms that many action fans have little patience with Wong's artiness, while *Ip Man* delivers less festival-friendly retro kung fu thrills. Both films are tailored to their stars' respective personas – Yen's physical prowess, Leung's quiet romanticism. Both films are nostalgic in their own way – *Ip Man* for a disappearing local genre (*wuxia* originates in China, but the kung fu film is entirely Hong Kong's own), *The Grandmaster* pervaded by Wong's habitual bittersweet melancholy. But in other ways they have much in common, 'printing the legend' of a real-life master, exploring the specificities of particular martial arts traditions, how they are transmitted and to whom, and, in the case of *The Grandmaster*, how some of them might be lost. ☹



Last man standing: Anthony Wong as Ip Man in Herman Yau's *Ip Man: The Final Fight* (2013)



# FLIGHT OF FANCY

*'Birdman', Alejandro González Iñárritu's tale of an actor looking to get his career flying again years after walking out on a superhero franchise, sees the director jettisoning the weighty metaphysical issues of his previous work in favour of a welcome lightness of touch*

By Paul Julian Smith

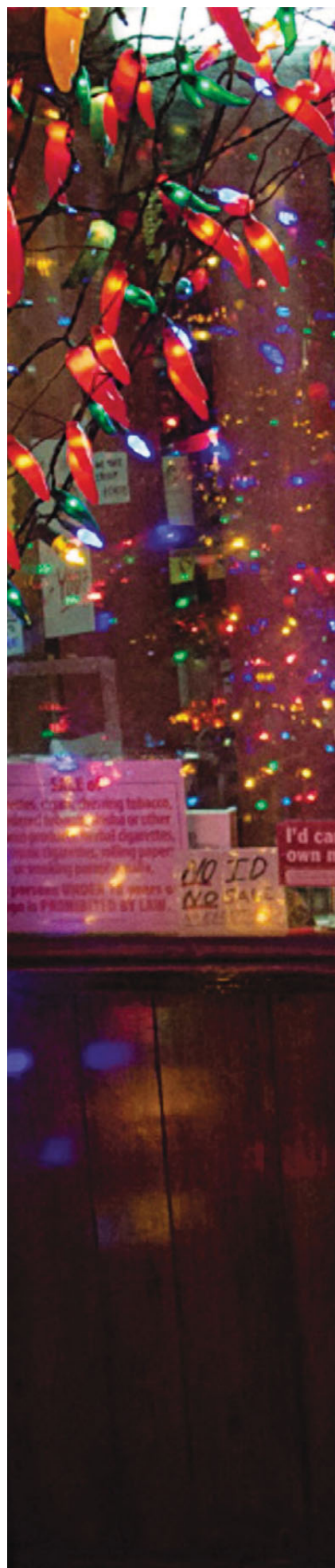
**Birdman is a palpable hit.** When Mexican auteur Alejandro González Iñárritu's fifth feature had its world premiere at Venice at the end of August, *The Hollywood Reporter's* Todd McCarthy praised the film, which appears to be a single take, as "one of the most sustained examples of visually fluid *tour de force* cinema anyone's ever seen". *Birdman*, McCarthy wrote, "flies very, very high". Audiences would seem to concur. When it opened in the US, *Birdman* or (*The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance*) had one of the highest screen averages of the year, earning more than \$100,000 per screen. And Michael Keaton as Riggan, a washed-up movie star staking his comeback on a Broadway play written, directed and starring himself, was instantly proclaimed a frontrunner for the Oscars.

This combination of critical acclaim and commercial clout is not unrelated to *Birdman's* theme. The film charts the partly comic and wholly chaotic days before the premiere of a version of Raymond Carver's bleak 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love', the highbrow project chosen by Riggan as a career panacea some years after walking out on a Hollywood superhero franchise. While Keaton himself has doggedly rejected the thesis

that the role is autobiographical, clearly we bring to the table our knowledge of his own flight from *Batman* some two decades ago. And the fact that his damaged daughter Sam is played by Emma Stone, currently showcased in the latest *Spiderman* reboot, means that much of the movie's effect relies on its casting and the knowledge it assumes on the part of the audience.

Moreover the art/commerce binary maps all too neatly on to the theatre/cinema dichotomy. Edward Norton (whose *Death to Smoochy* with Robin Williams in 2002 was an earlier satire on the tragicomic predicaments of media folk) here plays a celebrated dramatic actor whose devotion to authenticity extends as far as drinking real alcohol on stage and attempting to have sex with a starlet during the performance. Likewise, outside the film itself, Keaton's 'realness' has been praised by critics for its supposed unvarnished lack of vanity, stripped as the onetime Bat-suited star is here of wig and makeup.

Yet this traditional setup is contested within the film itself. Stone's sarcastic Sam describes the Broadway audience as 1,000 white people whose biggest problem is deciding where to eat after the show. And







**THE COMEBACK KID**  
Michael Keaton's performance in *Birdman* has been praised for its unvarnished lack of vanity and is regarded as a frontrunner for the Best Actor Oscar



later she defines real media power as Twitter: after an inadvertent jog through Times Square in his underpants, her father has become an accidental trending topic. Beyond the movie, real life would seem once more to bear out the thesis that New York theatre is now wholly converged with other and newer media. Currently playing at the historic St James Theatre on 44th St, whose labyrinthine corridors and cavernous stage hosted the *Birdman* shoot, is new musical *Side Show*, shamelessly hawked on posters as featuring “the flash and velocity of a Hollywood motion picture”. Next door *Rock of Ages* is not averse to boasting a self-proclaimed “YouTube sensation” in its cast. Just a block away in Times Square are billboards for *The Comeback*, the second season of Lisa Kudrow’s meta-comedy on the humiliations of a one-time sitcom star trying to get her career back on track.

### FLYING HIGH

Surely in such a multimedia context the confused Riggan is unlikely to gain his hoped-for kudos? But what the Broadway setting offers is four things we have not previously seen in *Īnárri*tu’s *oeuvre*: a new vision of New York, an unsuspected sense of humour, a self-conscious exploration of acting and a slimmed-down model of narration.

First, and going against the common wisdom that Times Square has been wholly sanitised, *Birdman*’s location is convincingly grungy and textured, and not just in the dusty dressing room where Riggan gives free rein to his frustrations. The theatre district is here strewn with trash bags and dotted with ancient stoops for our hero to pass out on after an alcohol-dazed night. Stone and Norton play truth or dare (she spits on theatregoers on the street below) on a rundown terrace overlooking the midtown skyline with its gargantuan tourist hotels and time-worn bars. It is a view untransformed by the pencil-thin supertalls soaring elsewhere in Manhattan.

This convincing sense of place is inseparable from a localised sense of humour, surprising given that three of the four screenwriters have come from the po-faced *Biutiful* (2010). Movie insider jokes come thick and fast. When Riggan needs a new star for his show, his agent (played by a strangely subdued Zach Galifianakis) lists a litany of respected actors (Downey Jr, Fassbender, Renner) unavailable for the stage because they are locked into lucrative superhero franchises. A climactic accident will have him suggest a call to Meg Ryan’s plastic surgeon (no doubt now the reference would be to Renée Zellweger).

It cannot be stressed enough what a welcome novelty this lightness of touch is in *Īnárri*tu’s work. The Mexico City of *Amores perros* (2000) and the Memphis of *21 Grams* (2003) were studiously abstract settings for meta-physical dramas of mourning, melancholy and redemption. *Babel* (2006) flitted from Japan to Morocco to the Mexican border, all in the service of a banal moral: that cross-culture communication is tough. *Biutiful* crammed a telenovela’s worth of trauma into the story of a clairvoyant cancer victim (Javier Bardem in a showboating performance) fighting his way through an infernal Barcelona.

In spite of its meta mode, *Birdman*’s new humour is not cruel. Unlike in Kudrow’s bitter comedy, Riggan’s comeback is shown with sympathy and affection. And his character is fleshed out through his complex relationships with women. We see his tentative interactions with the young co-star (an unstable Andrea Riseborough), who

may or may not be pregnant, and the ex-wife (a precisely observed Amy Ryan), wryly tender towards the man who treated her so badly.

In *Birdman*, among Riggan’s many humiliations is his failure as a director: Norton’s drunken, sex-obsessed Mike runs rings round the older man, a theatrical neophyte. *Īnárri*tu on the other hand, even in the midst of the choreographed cinematography of the magisterial Emmanuel Lubezki, redefines film directing as the direction of actors. Keaton is led to evoke keen shame and deep sympathy in the audience, often at the same time. Stone (her teen comedies like *Easy A* now so distant) seems truly dangerous as the caustic neglected daughter, just out of rehab and inadvisedly employed as her father’s assistant. At the start of the film, one bad actor is punished by a falling light that sends him to hospital. Clearly the thespian path is a perilous one. To focus on acting as the main theme, then, is generously to hand the cast a share in the auteurship of the film. I am not the only critic to see a precedent for *Birdman*’s *Īnárri*tu-Keaton collaboration in backstage dramas such as John Cassavetes’s *Opening Night* with Gena Rowlands.

Like Cassavetes’s film, *Īnárri*tu’s narrative hurtles relentlessly to that first vital (deadly) performance. *Īnárri*tu thus abandons the network narratives of his first trilogy, which were dependent on master screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga. In those works, multiple shards of story and character barely intersected: the hit man and the top model of *Amores perros*, the professor and the jailbird of *21 Grams*, the Moroccan peasant and the Japanese teen of *Babel*. Even *Biutiful* shovelled a truckload of incident on to the hapless Bardem (the mental illness of a wife, the accidental death of Chinese immigrants). The narrative perspective in *Birdman* is more focused, but remains richly complex. Thus the very first shot shows Keaton from behind, apparently levitating in his dressing room. And Riggan is tormented throughout the film by the sonorous inner voice of his taunting superhero character. Halfway through, *Birdman* literally takes flight, with soaring aerial shots reminiscent of *Batman* or *Spiderman* but also of *The Sea Inside* by that other global Spanish-speaking director Alejandro Amenábar.

Even as we glory in the new sweep and swoop of our hero, however, these sequences appear to be flatly contradicted by the events surrounding them. After what seems to have been an aerial transit to the theatre, we see a taxi driver loudly demanding Riggan’s unpaid fare. Likewise, Riggan’s telekinesis (smashing furniture against the walls of that prison-like dressing room) is shown only when he is alone. Subjective shots thus mingle ambiguously with subjective sound: the stentorian inner voice that seems more real to Riggan than the pale, wrinkled face he sees in the mirror.

In spite of these novelties, however, there remain in *Birdman* hidden connections to the director’s earlier *oeuvre* and even to a Mexican context for a long exiled auteur. Unlike the single-shot *Birdman*, *Amores perros* boasted lightning quick cuts, especially in an opening car chase that announced a newly vital and youthful cinema for Mexico. But, beyond introducing Gael García Bernal as the dog-fighting youth, *Īnárri*tu’s first film had a long central section on the moneyed elite of the culture industry, a media milieu not so dissimilar to *Birdman*’s. Like Riggan the model in *Amores perros* is mocked by the

*Even in the midst of the choreographed cinematography of the magisterial Emmanuel Lubezki, Īnárri*tu redefines film directing as the direction of actors





very public indignities of a fall from grace; a billboard opposite her home confronts her with an image that is no longer her own just as Riggan keeps a *Birdman* poster in his dressing room, which causes him some anxiety.


Likewise, in *21 Grams*, Naomi Watts is a dirty blonde Memphis mom who descends into drug addiction when her children are killed. The stakes may seem lower for her *Birdman* character but, as we are reminded with only the lightest of irony, a Broadway debut can be a matter of life and death for a fragile actress. As for *Babel*, the grandiose global reach is here abandoned for a few blocks of Broadway. But the theme of lack of communication continues, albeit with a very new tone. Riggan struggles to connect not only with his daughter, ex-wife, current lover and co-stars, but also with the vicious *New York Times* critic ("I'll kill your play") impersonated by a gimlet-eyed (and gimlet-drinking) Lindsay Duncan.

Finally, *Biutiful* not only marked a break with the exhausted multi-strand format, it also broached for the first time the theme of the supernatural, as the dying hero communes with the dead. And although Riggan's flights are bracketed with prompts that define them as fantasy (the complaining cab driver), Iñárritu nonetheless slips into *Birdman* a magical final sequence, which is defiantly left open. It is perhaps no accident that this scene replays what is perhaps the director's most consistent auteurist trope: a troubled paternity. All of Iñárritu's films mourn absent fathers and lost children. Here, for the first time and in the very last shot, a father and his damaged daughter will be ultimately, if problematically, reconciled.

If this film is personal, then, does it have a Mexican context? Credited here as 'Alejandro G. Iñárritu', the director would appear to have gone native, having dropped his first surname, the most important to a Spanish speaker. And Fernanda Solórzano, a Mexican contributor to *Sight & Sound*, has already claimed *Birdman* as Iñárritu's

most autobiographical film to date. It opened Mexico's Morelia International Film Festival on 17 October, the same day as its theatrical release in the US. And Iñárritu has a long history with that festival. Its director, Daniela Michel, revealed this year that Iñárritu had generously funded the short films event that later became the Morelia festival when he himself was known only for TV commercials (Iñárritu's professional background is in radio and television, not theatre). Morelia's opening film the previous year had been Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity*. Artistically ambitious blockbusters by Mexican directors in exile seem to be becoming something of a habit.

Indeed my local multiplex in midtown Manhattan currently has *Birdman* playing in tandem with *The Book of Life*, a children's animation feature produced by Guillermo del Toro and based around Mexico's Day of the Dead celebrations. In the Mexican press del Toro called his film "a story not about Mexico but from Mexico". Considering the linked careers in the US of the three amigos, surely unparalleled by filmmakers from any other country, it may not be such a stretch to read *Birdman* (like *Gravity* and *The Book of Life*) in the context of an increasing cultural convergence between Mexico and the United States.

Iñárritu would seem to have had a miraculous career. Each of his films has been strewn with prizes. But in interview, he has claimed, in support of the autobiographical thesis, that he himself hears that taunting inner voice. In conclusion, if *Birdman* has indeed magically revived someone's career, it may not be Keaton's, but rather Iñárritu's. And ironically it has done so by jettisoning those weighty metaphysical issues that must have previously seemed the director's surest route to the lofty heights of art. *Birdman*, finally and to its great credit, comes movingly, humanly down to earth. 



***Birdman* is released in UK cinemas on 2 January and is reviewed on page 69**

#### CITY LIGHTS

(Clockwise from below left) Michael Keaton as actor-director Riggan Thomson and Edward Norton as Mike, a key member of his Broadway cast, in *Birdman*; Emma Stone as Riggan's troubled daughter Sam; and Naomi Watts as Lesley, an actress in Riggan's play





## MAN BEHIND THE MASK

Michael Keaton shows off his enormous range in 'Birdman', playing it like a collage of every role he's ever had in a career that's been rich in variety if not always in quality

By Anne Billson

The best thing about Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman* or (*The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance*) is that it puts Michael Keaton back on the map. It seems an age since we last saw him, though since the millennium he has been working steadily in supporting roles, television and the sort of films not considered worthy of red carpets and hype – almost as though his career were less of a priority than, say, hanging out on his Montana ranch, going fishing, or tweeting Instagram snaps taken on safari with his son.

But *Birdman* is garnering hype aplenty, particularly for the star's high-wire balancing act of a performance, which Iñárritu filmed in long uninterrupted takes designed to give the impression the entire film was shot in a single continuous sequence. Keaton plays Riggan Thomson, a washed-up movie star trying to revive his career. He is plagued by self-doubt and troubled relationships, all the while haunted by the spectre of his own fame in the physical form of Birdman, the superhero from a wildly successful franchise in which he once starred.

Since Keaton is still best known for having played Batman, twice, it's tempting to assume



Dead end job: Henry Winkler, Shelley Long and Michael Keaton in *Night Shift* (1982)

there was an autobiographical element to the role. Not so, he told *CBS Sunday Morning*: "I probably relate less to this character than anybody I've ever done." What is clear, though, is that it's the first film in years that has allowed him to show his full range.

From his first film appearance, grooving in a doorway to 'Jumpin' Jack Flash' in *Night Shift* (1982), Keaton commanded attention. His Bill Blazejowski, one of a pair of morgue attendants who use their workplace to set up a prostitution ring, is a hyperactive bundle of manic traits, a gum-chewing baby-faced Loki-like trickster with devilish eyebrows, simultaneously stupid and smart. By the time he made the film, Keaton was already

31 years old. Born Michael Douglas in 1951, near Pittsburgh, he had tried stand-up comedy and worked as a cameraman before popping up in TV shows such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Hour*, and landing a leading role opposite James Belushi in a short-lived blue-collar TV sitcom called *Working Stiffs*. SAG rules and a surfeit of Michael Douglasses had obliged him to change his name.

After *Night Shift*, he turned down the role of Tom Hanks's feckless porn-loving brother in 1984's *Splash* (played in the film by John Candy) because it was too similar to Blazejowski. Instead, he starred in *Mr. Mom* (1983), a knockabout sitcom-style farce with a screenplay by John Hughes, about a stay-at-home dad who makes a hash of the housework while his wife (Teri Garr) becomes the breadwinner. *Mr. Mom* cemented the public view of Keaton as a purveyor of family-friendly comedy, which his next few films, mostly flops, did nothing to dispel. He was cast as the leading man in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) but, after ten days' filming, Woody Allen decided his performance was too contemporary for the 1930s setting and replaced him with Jeff Daniels. For a while, it seemed as though Keaton's career had stalled. But he unleashed his demonic side, with a vengeance, as the lecherous 'bio-exorcist' in *Beetlejuice* (1988), dominating Tim Burton's comic afterlife fantasy with a fusillade of lewd patter like a vaudeville act from hell. Pauline Kael likened his performance to "an exploding head".

He won critical plaudits for playing an obnoxious yuppie cokehead in Glenn Gordon Caron's rehab-drama *Clean and Sober* (1988), and won more admirers in *The Dream Team* (1989), a comic riff on *One Flew over the*



It's a wonderful afterlife: Michael Keaton (centre) in Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice* (1988)





**Opposites attract: Michael Keaton as the Caped Crusader and Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman in Tim Burton's *Batman Returns* (1992)**

*Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) in which four psychiatric patients have to fend for themselves on a daytrip to Manhattan; described by one of the other characters as a “walking time-bomb”, Keaton socks over the gags with motor-mouthed sarcasm as the audience’s identification figure, while threatening to erupt into violence at any second.

But he was still best known as ‘Mr. Mom’ when Burton cast him as Batman. The announcement outraged comic-book fans, who pelted Warner Bros with 50,000 letters of complaint. Their fears were laid to rest by the finished film. Leaving it to Jack Nicholson’s Joker to provide the antic element, Keaton gave a subtle, nuanced performance, playing Bruce Wayne as a brooding bachelor in tasteful turtlenecks but also showing that, like Peter Weller in *RoboCop* (1987), his mouth and voice were distinctive enough to hold the attention even when half his face was obscured by a mask. Keaton was even better in *Batman Returns* (1992), still the sexiest superhero movie in a genre that has otherwise expunged any hint of eroticism. Batman’s rooftop face-

offs with Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer) are a kinky-licky Apache Dance, closer to consummating the relationship than the two damaged psyches pursuing doomed romance out of costume. But the film was deemed too dark and disturbing for the sort of family entertainment envisaged by Warner Bros, whose declared intention to lighten up the franchise was a factor in Keaton’s refusal to play Batman a third time.

For a while, it looked as though Keaton’s career had peaked with the Batsuit. Avoiding the tyranny of typecasting, and seemingly unfettered by the need to be loved, he played the first of several dapper villains – the world’s worst tenant in *Pacific Heights* (1990), not just refusing to pay rent but going psycho on his landlords with a nailgun. He would

*Like Peter Weller in RoboCop, Keaton’s mouth and voice were distinctive enough to hold the attention even when half his face was obscured by a mask*

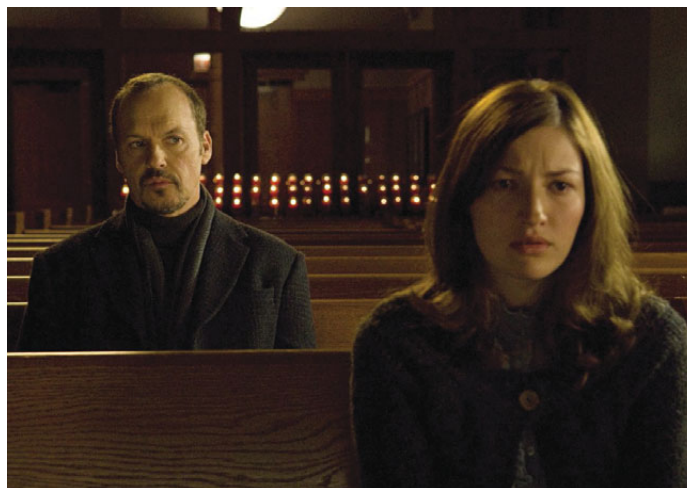
later revisit this archetype in *Desperate Measures* (1998), racking up an impressive body count as a convict whose bone marrow is a rare match to that of a cop’s ailing son, and in *Penthouse North* (2013), a tired retread of *Wait Until Dark* (1967) in which he demonstrates his psycho credentials by throwing the heroine’s cat off the penthouse terrace. (Spoiler: the cat survives.)

He stepped out of his comfort zone to play Dogberry the constable, with iffy Irish accent, in Kenneth Branagh’s sloppy *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), played a dying father-to-be making videos for his unborn child in the maudlin *My Life* (1993), and reteamed with Ron Howard, his *Night Shift* and *Gung Ho* (1986) director, as the focus of an ensemble cast in the lightweight dramedy *The Paper* (1994). But his fanbase was dwindling; the likeable romantic comedy *Speechless* (1994), with Keaton and Geena Davis as rival political speech writers, failed to get a theatrical release in the UK.

The most challenging role from his post-Batman period was in Harold Ramis’s *Multiplicity* (1996), about a harassed





Clone Wars: Keaton sees double in *Multiplicity* (1996)Hit man and her: Keaton and Kelly Macdonald in *The Merry Gentleman* (2008)

husband and father who secretly clones himself in order to spend more time with his family. It was a splendid showcase for Keaton, who skilfully incarnated four sides of one personality, but the film petered out into tepid farce instead of milking the situation for deeper meaning, like the same director's *Groundhog Day* (1993). Residual goodwill was severely tested by *Jack Frost* (1998), even more maudlin than *My Life*, in which a dead father is reincarnated as a snowman so his young son can come to terms with his bereavement.

From here on, Keaton seemed to duck out of the limelight, though he was still capable of stealing scenes. In unprecedented crossover casting, he played special agent Ray Nicolette in Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* (1997) and Steven Soderbergh's *Out of Sight* (1998), both adaptations of Elmore Leonard novels but otherwise unconnected. "He tries to act cool," observes Jackie, to which Max the bail bondsman replies, "He's a young guy havin' fun being a cop." And Keaton, who hardly seemed any older than when he'd made his debut in *Night Shift*, did indeed seem to be having a ball playing the ebullient gum-chewing ATF agent.

Post-millennium, he appeared in HBO's *Live from Baghdad* (2002), about the rise of CNN; *Quicksand* (2003), a bland Euro-thriller, probably one of the last films in which a banker is the hero; a bereaved husband trying to contact his dead wife in *White Noise* (2005), a pseudo-scientific spookfest that proved unexpectedly popular. He was set to play the Matthew Fox role in the pilot episode of *Lost* (2004), but backed out when TV executives balked at the idea of killing his character off in it. He played serial dads to Lindsay Lohan in *Herbie: Fully Loaded* (2005), to Katie Holmes in *First Daughter* (2004), to Alexis Bledel in *Post Grad* (2009).

There was voicework for Pixar in *Cars* (2006) and (as Ken) in *Toy Story 3* (2010), to set alongside beautifully gruff vocals

in the English-language dub of Miyazaki Hayao's *Porco Rosso*. He was electrifying as a fast-talking salesman in the otherwise undistinguished *The Last Time* (2006), mesmerising as James Jesus Angleton (2007) in the otherwise undistinguished TNT mini-series *The Company*, and nicely underplayed a contract killer befriending an abused woman in the flawed but interesting *The Merry Gentleman* (2008), which he directed when the original director dropped out for health reasons. He was delightful in *The Other Guys* (2010) as an atypically amiable police captain;

*'Birdman' sees Michael Keaton depict a man trying desperately to marshal all the facets of his disintegrating personality into one human being*

stepped in as generic villain when Hugh Laurie dropped out of the *RoboCop* (2014) remake; gurned manically as a drag-racing impresario in *Need for Speed* (2014), a bloated B movie starring *Breaking Bad*'s Aaron Paul.

*Birdman*, if not precisely the story of Keaton's career, could nevertheless be seen as some sort of CV-style summary of it. Riggan Thomson is like a quicksilver collage of every character he has ever played – father and ex-husband, superhero and supervillain, manic and melancholy, masked and exposed, monstrously egotistical and heartbreakingly vulnerable, a man trying desperately to marshal all the facets of his disintegrating personality into one human being. *Multiplicity* to the max. It's the most astonishing showreel ever assembled – and all in one take, or as near enough as makes no difference. You want to see what Michael Keaton can do? Take a look. 📺

Flight risk: Keaton with Pam Grier in *Jackie Brown* (1997)





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# FILMS OF THE YEAR

Quality narrative cinema gets the usual thumbs-up in our 2014 poll, but some exceptional documentaries were arguably more important – while shifts within the industry, particularly in its relationship with television, should make for an intriguing 2015

By Nick James

Any response to our 2014 poll results must start with congratulations to director Richard Linklater, his cast and crew for the runaway success of our number one film of the year, *Boyhood* – the portrait of a young boy growing up from the age of six to 17 that was actually shot over an 11-year period. It attracted more than double the votes of Jean-Luc Godard's second-placed *Goodbye to Language 3D*. Apart from the praise for the entire ensemble's patient dedication, which any project that takes a decade to realise deserves, it should be noted that *Boyhood* incorporates brilliantly within itself the current necessity for a film to be a 'special event'. We've become used, for instance, to the need for one-off screenings in an atmospheric setting with special guests and peripheral recreations. But actors ageing for real on screen is what makes *Boyhood* simultaneously a fictional and a non-fictional event – a news item, in fact – lending it a fascination that other films cannot match. The Godard film's success is singular too. Whatever you make of *Goodbye to Language* – and I won't attempt to grapple with it here – its puckish sense of fun in the way it plays with 3D seems particularly fresh from an old master usually more inclined to stringent surprises.

A casual glance down the top ten might make any reader say: "Ah, a typical *Sight & Sound* list." After all, it includes regular auteur favourites Godard, Pedro Costa, Wes Anderson, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Pawel Pawlikowski and Lisandro Alonso. And with *Under the Skin* and *Leviathan*, Jonathan Glazer and Andrey Zvyagintsev, respectively, have now earned their own place as significant talents of our age. The list also gives us one impressive newcomer in Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy, whose *The Tribe* has its own built-in singularity in that it's performed throughout in sign language. Of course, the peculiarities of our voting rules – that we ask people to choose from any films they saw in 2014, irrespective of whether or not they have had a UK release yet – mean those seen by some in one year and others in the next have a slight disadvantage: *Under the Skin*, for instance, was in the chart

last year in 17th position. But it's also often true that a recently released or about-to-be released film, fresh in everyone's mind, tends to have a strong showing – hence, perhaps, the very high placings of *Goodbye to Language* and *Leviathan*.

My own impression is that 2014 wasn't the strongest year for fiction features, arthouse or otherwise. This is partly because none of the arthouse heavy hitters – Haneke, Almodóvar – has released a film this year. The fact that I voted for *Ida* last year and haven't yet seen *Horse Money* may also have something to do with it. I do like and admire all of the 19 films in the top 20 that I've seen but they don't, for me, amount to an outstanding corpus. It's noticeable, for instance, that the Dardenne brothers, whose films usually hover near the top, have lost some ground with *Two Days, One Night*. But maybe I'm wrong about that general view; maybe this is a transitional moment, when this year's chosen begin to take over from their older peers. On that note, I'm hopeful that the terrific, yet-to-be-released films I have seen – that happen to be directed by women – such as Mia Hansen-Løve's *Eden*, Alice Rohrwacher's *The Wonders* and Céline Sciamma's *Girlhood* will do better in next year's poll. In auteurist terms such matters are pure serendipity, of course, because it depends who happens to have a film out in any given year. But having seen so many exceptional and significant documentaries – Sergei Loznitsa's *Maidan*, Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Look of Silence*, Fred Wiseman's *National Gallery*, Laura Poitras's *Citizenfour* and Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard's *20,000 Days on Earth* – I am surprised they didn't shoulder aside more fiction features. Perhaps the fact that a documentary, Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing*, topped last year's poll has led to a fictioneers' backlash among the voters, or perhaps our very first poll for the Greatest Documentaries of All Time, which we ran in our September issue, exhausted all their enthusiasm for non-fiction works.

If the aesthetic preferences of our poll contributors haven't altered much, there ought to be

*We've become used to the current necessity for a film to be a 'special event', with one-off screenings, special guests and peripheral recreations*







## Top 20

- |           |   |            |  |
|-----------|---|------------|--|
| <b>1</b>  | <b>Boyhood</b><br><i>Richard Linklater</i>              | <b>=11</b> | <b>Mr. Turner</b><br><i>Mike Leigh</i>                                       |
| <b>2</b>  | <b>Goodbye to Language 3D</b><br><i>Jean-Luc Godard</i> | <b>=11</b> | <b>National Gallery</b><br><i>Frederick Wiseman</i>                          |
| <b>=3</b> | <b>Leviathan</b><br><i>Andrey Zvyagintsev</i>           | <b>=11</b> | <b>The Wolf of Wall Street</b><br><i>Martin Scorsese</i>                     |
| <b>=3</b> | <b>Horse Money</b><br><i>Pedro Costa</i>                | <b>=11</b> | <b>Whiplash</b><br><i>Damien Chazelle</i>                                    |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>Under the Skin</b><br><i>Jonathan Glazer</i>         | <b>15</b>  | <b>The Duke of Burgundy</b><br><i>Peter Strickland</i>                       |
| <b>6</b>  | <b>The Grand Budapest Hotel</b><br><i>Wes Anderson</i>  | <b>=16</b> | <b>Birdman</b><br><i>Alejandro G. Iñárritu</i>                               |
| <b>7</b>  | <b>Winter Sleep</b><br><i>Nuri Bilge Ceylan</i>         | <b>=16</b> | <b>Two Days, One Night</b><br><i>Jean-Pierre Dardenne &amp; Luc Dardenne</i> |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>The Tribe</b><br><i>Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy</i>      | <b>=18</b> | <b>Citizenfour</b><br><i>Laura Poitras</i>                                   |
| <b>=9</b> | <b>Ida</b><br><i>Pawel Pawlikowski</i>                  | <b>=18</b> | <b>The Wind Rises</b><br><i>Miyazaki Hayao</i>                               |
| <b>=9</b> | <b>Jauja</b><br><i>Lisandro Alonso</i>                  | <b>=18</b> | <b>The Look of Silence</b><br><i>Joshua Oppenheimer</i>                      |





◀ widespread anxiety among them about the distribution chances of auteur films in the future. One marked change in the UK specialist market this year has been the low-to-invisible profile of French cinema, once the staple diet of the arthouses. With sometimes as many as 15 titles being released in any one week in the UK, profit margins for subtitled movies are under greater pressure than ever. Indeed, the film distribution scene in general has never seemed more fragmented and disorderly. The list of the Film Distributors' Association, which is the media's best guide to the films that receive genuine releases rather than just screenings to satisfy contractual agreements, has of late become less reliable. Titles now sometimes appear that subsequently play just a single screening in a commercial theatre – how can that be classed as a 'release'? In the age of Netflix, the answer is probably that the definition of what qualifies as a film release is changing for good, possibly beyond professional guidance.

You might imagine that one consequence of this flooded marketplace would be that films with substantial marketing spend would enjoy ever more of the shrinking media spotlight. But it doesn't feel quite like that. In general, the way cinema reaches its audiences seems increasingly disparate, more scattergun. In the multiplexes, quality cinema now mostly means films based on pulp-friendly material – the likes of *Gone Girl*, *Interstellar* or *Nightcrawler*; films that hope, often successfully, to bypass their narrative flaws through their sensationalised concepts. Some now argue that there's little to distinguish in some cultural artefacts between content and marketing. Maybe that's what Hollywood old timers meant when they declared that a film "sells itself".

Contributors were also asked to choose their favourite television programmes. That TV is where the adult viewing experience and much of the best writing and directorial talent now lie is an argument that continues to gain force. Remember how powerful the push behind our voters' TV favourite *True Detective* was while its first series was first running? Given that so much TV drama is being consumed through pay per view, subscription sites and DVD box sets, you get the sense that the reciprocal prejudices and snobberies between cinema and television drama are beginning to fall away. When yet another new-media player in Amazon opts to fund such high-budget drama as *Transparent* and *Ripper Street*'s third series, we can all stop thinking about television in the way we used to. TV bloggers, such as the *Guardian*'s Mark Lawson, may worry about how the arrival of Danny Boyle and Steven Soderbergh challenges a television drama culture that hails the writer as auteur, but this ignores the long-standing involvement of film directors

in television highlighted in our September 2013 issue. I'd say that writer-director collaborations reflect the ideal credit situation, such as that between UK screenwriter Tony Grisoni and US director Sean Durkin on the excellent *Southcliffe*. British television drama directors tend to be underrated. Take, for example, Channel 4's groundbreaking series *Utopia*. All the talk about it being remade in the US has been focused on what director David Fincher will do with it, while the stunning visual style of the UK series has not led to its UK directors receiving anything like the same attention.

Where British cinema is concerned it is great to see *Under the Skin*, Mike Leigh's delightful *Mr. Turner* and Peter Strickland's *The Duke of Burgundy* in the top 20. The Nick Cave documentary I mentioned earlier – *20,000 Days on Earth* – missed out by just one vote. We might claim Pawel Pawlikowski as an erstwhile British filmmaker, but *Ida* is most definitely a Polish film. In any case, apart from these imaginative films, a year in which British cinema seemed to be marking time would be no surprise following the Best Picture Oscar win for Steve McQueen's magnificent *12 Years a Slave* in February.

Among the lists on the following pages, you'll find some short round-ups of other themes I've not touched on here. But, thinking back to the rows kicked up in 2013 over *The Act of Killing* and *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, controversy is here conspicuous by its absence. Our poll is one of consensus. Nevertheless, the themes I've picked up on – transformation of old distribution models, increased competition for the subtitled film market (such as it is), how increasingly hard it is to disentangle 'content' and marketing (in an age in which propaganda and reportage have become equally hard to separate), the convergence of film and television – all bleed into or overlap in their influence on one another, and this has to be down to the dominance of social media in discourse on the moving image.

The impression that 2014 was a low-key year for cinema comes in part from the general blanding of culture that, in turn, is a result of so much pandering to pre-existing audience tastes, so much sentimentality and nostalgia of the kind that is rampant on social media. One of the great achievements of *Boyhood* is that it wins our hearts without much recourse to unearned emotion. We are moved by Mason Evans Jr (Ellar Coltrane) because of the experiences of his that we have witnessed, rather than because someone told us to cry or gave us permission to hug one another. On this matter I am reminded of the rules the writers of the great US comedy series of the 1990s, *Seinfeld*, set down for themselves: "no hugging, no learning". If I had a mantra for 2015, that would be it. ☺

*When yet another new-media player such as Amazon opts to fund the high-budget 'Ripper Street', we can all stop thinking about television in the way we used to*

**SOFA CINEMA**  
(Top, left to right) Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson in HBO's *True Detective*; Jeffrey Tambor in the Amazon-funded *Transparent*; and Sean Harris in *Southcliffe*



# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

**Please note:** below are 50 critics' lists of their highlights of 2014, out of more than 100 responses on which the poll on the previous page is based. The remaining lists and highlights will be posted online in December

## GEOFF ANDREW

Senior film programmer,  
BFI Southbank, UK

**Winter Sleep** Nuri Bilge Ceylan

**Two Days, One Night** Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne

**Timbuktu** Abderrahmane Sissako

**The Blue Room** Mathieu Amalric

**Maidan** Sergei Loznitsa

● I'd have liked to draw attention to *Leviathan*, *The Wonders*, *Foxcatcher*, *Listen Up Philip*, *The Lamb*, *Macondo*, *The Second Game* and some others, not to mention the restored *Only Angels Have Wings*. I didn't see in time for the poll *Interstellar* and a couple of other films I was especially keen to catch. But I confess I didn't find it an outstanding year. There were quite a few films raved about by others which I considered very good but not great; some which I found disappointing or underwhelming; and a handful which I found poor or quite laughably silly. I shan't name them here, as I don't wish to spoil anyone's enjoyment of them. My top five as it stands strikes me as a touch predictable (in terms of my tastes), but I'm sticking by it. I'm not trying to impress anyone, and all five films gave me enormous enjoyment and plenty of food for thought. They display genuine if subtle artistry; they also all seem 'relevant' in one way or another, and to have a real *raison d'être*. That's not as common as it might be.

## NICK BRADSHAW

Web editor, *Sight & Sound*, UK

**The Wind Rises** Miyazaki Hayao

**The Look of Silence**

Joshua Oppenheimer

**Citizenfour** Laura Poitras

**My Name Is Salt** Farida Pacha

**We Come as Friends** Hubert Sauper

## PETER BRADSHAW

Critic, *the Guardian*, UK

**Boyhood** Richard Linklater

**Foxcatcher** Bennett Miller

**Leviathan** Andrey Zvyagintsev

**The Falling** Carol Morley

**The Tribe** Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy

## TOM CHARITY

Critic and programmer, Vancity Theatre, Canada

**Winter Sleep** Nuri Bilge Ceylan

**Boyhood** Richard Linklater

**The Tale of the Princess**

**Kaguya** Takahata Isao

**The Look of Silence**

Joshua Oppenheimer

**Under the Skin** Jonathan Glazer

● A tip of the hat to the opening sequence of Matías Piñeiro's *The Princess of France*, as graceful an example of the choreography of bodies and camera as I have seen this year... Kudos to Jennifer Kent and Essie Davis, director and star of 2014's most exciting debut feature, *The Babadook*... Best surprise (dramatic feature): *The Homesman* (I'll say no more)... Best surprise (documentary): *The Overnighters*... Best zen slapstick: *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons*... Best title sequence: *Wild Tales*... Best end credits: *We Are the Best!*

## IAN CHRISTIE

Critic and film historian, Birkbeck College, University of London, UK

**Leviathan** Andrey Zvyagintsev

**Night Will Fall** André Singer

**Starred Up** David Mackenzie

**The Grand Budapest**

**Hotel** Wes Anderson

**Goodbye to Language**

3D Jean-Luc Godard

● Hard choices, as usual, with no space for Richard Ayoade's underrated *The Double*, venturing where Bertolucci once did, with impressive performances from Jesse Eisenberg; nor for Richard Linklater's moving marathon *Boyhood*. *Leviathan* confirmed Zvyagintsev's commanding status in a year without any new feature from Sokurov, but

I want to return to the gruesomely grotesque world of German's *Hard to be a God* before deciding what I think. In a slim (!) year for 3D, after *Gravity* pushed the envelope in many dimensions, Godard's eye-bending feature certainly made hard viewing, but pointed to new frontiers for 3D that few seem willing to explore. In documentary, Julien Temple's *Rio 50 Degrees: Carry on CaRiOca!* confirmed him as the liveliest city symphonist of our time. Among artists' films the three most impressive pieces I saw during the last 12 months were Willie Doherty's haunting *Remains*, shown in his exhibition 'Unseen' as part of Dery's City of Culture celebration in November 2013; Isaac Julien's complex multi-narrative *Playtime* at the Victoria Miro gallery, which defied viewers to find any single viewing position; and William Raban's bracingly evocative 72-82, covering ten years of fearless Acme Studios commissions.

**TV Long Shadow** BBC

An old-fashioned (in the good sense) presenter-led doc series on the legacies of World War I. Cambridge historian David Reynolds delivers an impressively concise script in a wide variety of locations to make a convincing case that WWI really does live on in our world, still shaping identities and conflicts across Europe and beyond.

## MICHEL CIMENT

Editor, *Positif*, France

**The Kindergarten Teacher** Nadav Lapid

**Leviathan** Andrey Zvyagintsev

**Life of Riley** Alain Resnais

**12 Years a Slave** Steve McQueen

**Winter Sleep** Nuri Bilge Ceylan

● Events of the year: 1) The exhilarating evening devoted to Pedro Almodóvar at the Lumière Film Festival in Lyon, France. 2) The three-disc Blu-ray and DVD of *Reflections in a Golden Eye* issued by Warners with the original 'golden' version as wanted by John Huston. 3) The completion of the restoration of all Chaplin's films at Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna. 4) *The Selected Letters of Elia Kazan* published by Knopf, New York, the best-ever correspondence of a film director. My top five films are in alphabetical order.

## ASHLEY CLARK

Critic and programmer, UK/USA

**Boyhood** Richard Linklater

**Concerning Violence**

Göran Hugo Olsson

**Dear White People** Justin Simien

**Murder in Pacot** Raoul Peck

**Second Coming** Debbie Tucker Green

● Within weeks of my move from England to America in July, two fatal instances of police brutality against unarmed black males – Eric Garner and Michael Brown – proved that Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, which celebrated its 25th anniversary that

month, was far from a museum piece. A personal highlight was speaking to filmmakers such as Steve McQueen and Göran Olsson about the film for a commemorative feature in *Sight & Sound*. Back in the UK, something exceptional happened: in Amma Asante's *Belle*, Destiny Ekaragha's *Gone Too Far!*, and Debbie Tucker Green's *Second Coming*, we saw only the third, fourth and fifth feature films by a black British female director to hit cinema screens; the first two succeeded in the UK, while *Second Coming* screened at the Toronto International Film Festival and will be released next year. It's to be hoped that this confluence is not a statistical aberration, but anticipates sustained careers. I was moved and exhilarated by the New York Museum of Modern Art's unearthing of an unreleased all-black cast feature from 1913, starring the great Caribbean-born vaudevillian Bert Williams. Finally, in *Force Majeure* and *Locke*, we had contrasting but equally piercing portraits of intransigent male pride and its disastrous effects. They, alongside Abderrahmane Sissako's *Timbuktu*, are unlucky not to make my final five.

**TV The Graham Norton Show** BBC

I suppose I should say *True Detective* or something, but when Norton's on form, with the right bunch of guests, he makes the chat-show genre soar, and he makes it look easy.

## KIERON CORLESS

Deputy editor, *Sight & Sound*, UK

**La Sapienza** Eugène Green

**Horse Money** Pedro Costa

**Sorrow and Joy** Nils Malmros

**Jauja** Lisandro Alonso

**Socialism** Peter von Bagh

## MARK COUSINS

Critic and filmmaker, UK

**Frank** Lenny Abrahamson

**The Wolf of Wall Street** Martin Scorsese

**Snowpiercer** Bong Joon-ho

**Spring in a Small Town** Fei Mu

**Ida** Pawel Pawlikowski

● *Frank* was as good as David Lynch's *The Elephant Man*, a masterpiece about wanting to hide from the world, or having to. And *Snowpiercer*! The visual ideas, that fantastic combination of action and repose, that you get more in Asian films than in Western ones. *The Wolf of Wall Street* was made by a filmmaker just out of the blocks, wasn't it? Is Scorsese in his twenties? I think so. The energy! *Spring in a Small Town* (1948) was a reissue, of course, but it's still the best Chinese film I've seen, and the best use of voiceover I know (it's why I use so much in my films). And *Ida*. Wow. Dreyer, back to life. I missed *Norte: The End of History*, and many other films that I was desperate to see, because life is sometimes as important as the movies.

**TV DIY SOS** BBC







**9 Jauja** Lisandro Alonso's 'Jauja' is such a marvellous experience: it shows that film is a medium that can lock up a history (or memories or dreams or nightmares) inside it, then release it in all the splendour of Patagonian skies. *Kong Rithdee*



**9 Ida** A spare, haunting piece of minimalism... crafted with deceptive simplicity, riven with uncertainty... its indelible images are a stark reminder of Bazin's dictum that film itself is a kind of miracle. *Catherine Wheatley, 'S&S', October 2014*



**8 The Tribe** Set in a school for deaf teenagers, it reimagines the language of sight and sound (or the absence of sound) in cinema to startlingly original effect; you watch and listen in a way that's entirely fresh and unfamiliar. *Jonathan Romney*

**MARIA DELGADO**

Academic and critic, UK

**Mr. Turner** Mike Leigh**Winter Sleep** Nuri Bilge Ceylan**Jauja** Lisandro Alonso**Gente de bien** Franco Lolli**Dos disparos** Martín Rejtman

● The madness of misguided masculinity resonates across my choices for 2014. Leigh's *Mr. Turner* offers a gloriously theatrical contemplation of the artist; Ceylan's *Winter Sleep* opts for a darker, more insular theatricality; both are centrally concerned with issues of performance and identity. I adored the pictorial beauty of Lisandro Alonso's *Jauja* – shot in vintage ratio with splashes of vibrant colour. It's a beguiling existentialist western, with Viggo Mortensen majestic as the Danish Don Quixote descending into madness. A washed-out father faces challenges from his young son in Colombian director Franco Lolli's neo-realist morality tale *Gente de bien* – the title means 'wealthy people' as well as 'good people' and the film brilliantly explores the tensions (and gaps) between these two definitions. And finally, my favourite film of the year, a new feature from the father of the New Argentine Cinema, Martín Rejtman. *Dos disparos* confirms Rejtman's status as one of world cinema's great satirists – a filmmaker whose absurdist studies of middle-class Argentines juggle wonderfully wayward narratives, minimalist performances and droll, deadpan dialogue. *Dos disparos* is a film that reminds us not everything has a rational explanation and that taking an unexpected detour often leads to the most extraordinary cinematic journeys.

**TV Sherlock** Mark Gatiss, Steven Moffat  
Witty, smart, intelligent television.

The three episodes were each inventively different, juggling different conundrums and conflicts through diverse narrative strategies. Series three ended on a high delectable screen pleasure.

**MAR DIESTRO-DOPIDO**Critic and researcher, *Sight & Sound*, UK**Only Lovers Left Alive** Jim Jarmusch**20,000 Days on Earth** Iain*Forsyth & Jane Pollard***Magical Girl** Carlos Vermut**Wild Tales** Damián Sziffrón**La Sapienza** Eugène Green

● My highlight of the year has to be watching Nick Cave's *20,000 Days on Earth* at Ritz's Big Scream in Brixton surrounded by – silent – babies under one, as transfixed as me.

**GEOFF DYER**

Writer, UK/USA

**The Great Beauty** Paolo Sorrentino**Locke** Steven Knight**Boyhood** Richard Linklater**Her** Spike Jonze**American Hustle** David O. Russell**TV The Roosevelts: An****Intimate History** Ken Burns**JEAN-MICHEL FRODON**

Critic, France

**Clouds of Sils Maria** Olivier Assayas**Horse Money** Pedro Costa**Silvered Water, Syria Self-****Portrait** Ossama Mohammed**& Wiam Simav Bedirxan****Nymph(omaniac** Lars von Trier**Still the Water** Naomi Kawase● ... And Jean-Luc Godard's *Goodbye**to Language?* Yes, of course. And

Wiseman, Cavalier, Diao Yinan, Dolan, Fincher, Tsai Mingliang, Hong Sang-soo, Eastwood, Delbono, Gitaï, Bonello, Lav Diaz, Eugène Green, Amalric, agnès b, Zürcher, Mati Diop, João Viana ... Whoever says it was not a good year for cinema should watch more, or better.

**TV L'il Quinquin** Bruno Dumont**GRAHAM FULLER**

Critic, USA

**Clouds of Sils Maria** Olivier Assayas**Norte, the End of History** Lav Diaz**Leviathan** Andrey Zvyagintsev**Inherent Vice** Paul Thomas Anderson**Only Lovers Left Alive** Jim Jarmusch

● If there is a commonality in the films I chose, it is their elegant harnessing of land- or cityscapes to depict metaphysically their protagonists' existential crises: the Alpine valley with its snaking vapour mass in *Sils Maria*; the Filipino beach shanties, liminal spaces, clifftops and burning river bank of *Norte*; the beach with the whale-skeleton in Putin's Russia in *Leviathan*; the decaying, paranoid, post-Manson hippie Los Angeles of *Inherent Vice*; and the ancient Tangier and necropolitan Detroit of *Only Lovers*. I will add the mushroom meadow in *A Field in England*, where the only treasure to be dug up is class-defying friendship. These are all brilliant reminders that a film's hero or heroine – or its conceptual antagonist – is the source of its environment and cosmic sensibility.

**TV L'il Quinquin** Bruno Dumont

Did Clouseau or Clouzot inspire Dumont's four-parter? A police procedural in which an inept detective and his gormless sidekick investigate several surreal murders, it unfolds in a Boulonnais coastal town so tolerant of evil it might have been modelled on the Anywheresville of 1943's *Le Corbeau*. Dumont brings humour to his latest inquiry into moral dankness and invests hope in the eponymous Brueghelian scamp and his trumpet-playing girlfriend.

**CHARLES GANT**Critic, *Heat* magazine, UK**Boyhood** Richard Linklater**Whiplash** Damien Chazelle**Nightcrawler** Dan Gilroy



**Foxcatcher** Bennett Miller  
**Eden** Mia Hansen-Løve

● The films I picked made me excited about cinema, or about life, or maybe they made me intoxicated by the sheer verve of the performances. *Whiplash*, at Directors' Fortnight in Cannes, was my most memorable cinematic experience of 2014. The elation felt like a drug, and I came back for more at the London Film Festival gala. *Nightcrawler* and *Eden*, for different reasons, also exert a narcotic effect. I remember watching *Broadcast News* (1987) all those years ago and feeling the excitement of live TV news directing, even amid the compromises and disappointments depicted. *Nightcrawler* is the year's most interestingly compelling commercial thriller but the adrenalin it releases comes with a sickening flavour of shame. *Eden* is a gloriously messy sprawl of a film, serially squandering its characters, and in defiance of all script-development wisdom. But the soundtrack of our lives, from Frankie Knuckles to Daft Punk, keeps on propelling it forwards, dragging us giddily along.

**TV** Fargo Noah Hawley

#### RYAN GILBEY

Critic, *New Statesman*, UK

**American Hustle** David O. Russell

**Boyhood** Richard Linklater

**The Second Game** Corneliu Porumboiu

**Under the Skin** Jonathan Glazer

**We Are the Best!** Lukas Moodysson

● Christopher Nolan claimed that *Interstellar* and *Boyhood* were "doing the same thing in a completely different way". While Nolan's emotionally bogus movie is full of pomp and portentousness, Richard Linklater's one wears its long production and philosophical heft lightly. It feels as effortless as breathing. Precious little happens, yet everything does. The same goes for *American Hustle* and *We Are the Best!*, not to mention *The Second Game*. Like *Boyhood*, it hinges on the tension between past, present and future. The filmmaker Corneliu Porumboiu and his father settle down to watch a videotape of a match that Porumboiu Snr refereed in 1988 on a snowy pitch that turns the colour of dirty tennis socks as play progresses. All we see is the original TV broadcast in its pre-digital fuzziness. Father and son muse over the game as we watch it in real time. No breaks, no edits, no camera movement: just the match. This viewer, no lover of either football or directors' commentaries, was captivated by the droll banter, the glimpses of social history and the self-deprecation of the whole affair. "This match is like one of my films," Porumboiu says during a lull. "It's long and nothing happens."

**TV** Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle, series three BBC



## THE LADIES AND THE TRAMP

A trio of 'lost' films featuring silent stars Betty Balfour and Colleen Moore were among the highlights in a year that belonged to Charlie Chaplin **By Pamela Hutchinson**



Send in the clown: Charlie Chaplin in *City Lights* (1931)

As far as silent film was concerned, this was always to be Charlie Chaplin's year, as early 2014 marked a century since The Tramp first shuffled in front of a Keystone camera. Between gala screenings at the big festivals, the belated publication of his novella and the Chaplin conference at Bologna, his dominance seemed assured. There were to be gatecrashers at Chaplin's feast, though; the year was abuzz with rediscoveries and restorations.

The surprise was how much we still had to appreciate about the brain beneath the bowler hat. Familiarity with the brand dims our recollection of Chaplin's particular genius, but this year we met a Chaplin we had not previously encountered – the fiction writer. His short novel *Footlights* emerged this year, edited by his biographer David Robinson and presented alongside material relating to the film it inspired, *Limelight* (1952): a precious opportunity to read about the London of Chaplin's childhood, in his own words.

One of the best-known silents, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), stepped out again in Berlin, with a colour-sensitive restoration that enhanced its reputation as the artiest of scary movies. Then, in spring, news broke that a lost Betty Balfour vehicle, the George Pearson-directed *Love, Life and Laughter* (1923), had been unearthed in the Netherlands. Cue much excitement, and lamenting over the Balfours-that-had-got-away. While we'll wait until the new year to see that film, screenings of two long-thought-lost capers starring Colleen Moore, one with a complete Vitaphone score, enchanted the festival crowds. Balfour and Moore were huge stars whose fame has faded because there is so little material to view. With more lucky finds like these, that situation will improve.

*Between festival gala screenings, the publication of his novella and the conference at Bologna, Chaplin's dominance of the year seemed assured*

In autumn, detective work at the Cinémathèque Française brought a famous portrayal of a much-loved character to light. William Gillette was regarded as the definitive Sherlock Holmes, playing him on stage ("Oh this is elementary, my dear fellow") and on film. His films have not surfaced since the silent era though, so viewings of the 1916 feature *Sherlock Holmes* at Toute la mémoire du monde in Paris and the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, will be hot tickets for 2015.

The most bizarre find of the year was plaster rather than nitrate: Cecil B. DeMille's sphinxes from *The Ten Commandments* (1923) were excavated from the Guadalupe-Nipomo sand dunes in California by archaeologists, and are now destined for display in a local museum.

We counted some losses this year too: Moore's one-time co-star Mickey Rooney died in April and, despite a flurry of online protest, the Universal soundstage where *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) was filmed was dismantled, although the studio intends to preserve the set.

And it was a year of sober remembrance, thanks to the centenary of the Great War. The BFI responded with an early-cinema revival show, *A Night at the Cinema in 1914*, featuring who else but Chaplin, and the restoration and rescore of Walter Summers's bombastic naval drama *The Battles of Coronel and Falkland Islands* (1927). ☹



## THE WORLD IN ACTION

Notwithstanding the overpolished, CGI-dependent likes of 'Godzilla' and 'Dawn of the Planet of the Apes', and the inevitable duds such as 'The Legend of Hercules', the year's action cinema wasn't really all that bad **By Nick Pinkerton**



Firing on all cylinders: *The Expendables 3*



Marvel to behold: *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*

Watching a recent Sunday night screening of *John Wick* in a near-empty theatre in upstate New York, I had the distinct feeling I was witnessing the end of cinema – either that, or it was 1995 and I was watching *Johnny Mnemonic* with my father again.

I might have been overreacting, for this year in action filmmaking wasn't too, too dire. For whatever reason, 2014's 'it's actually better than you think' reviews landed on this Keanu Reeves-as-hitman throwback trifle, while an actual honest-to-God movie such as David Ayer's boots-in-the-muck *Fury* was, appropriately enough, left to fend for itself with minimal reinforcements. The same fate befell *The Expendables 3* – though one can't be too hard on critics who'd experienced the bad-to-worse trajectory of Sylvester Stallone's human growth hormone-fuelled all-star revue for failing to notice that this one actually had a fairly ripping last half-hour, not to mention Mel Gibson going to town.

In movies, as in life, there are no certainties, but that Paul W.S. Anderson will show up semi-annually with an elegant, inventive tabletop game of a movie is as near as you'll get to one, and he had the whole of Mount Vesuvius for a playground in *Pompeii*. Trusty Jaume Collet-Serra, meanwhile, only needed the inside of a commercial jet liner in *Non-Stop*, which takes the honours for

The Year's Best Angry Liam Neeson movie. (I was tickled to pass some trailers for Collet-Serra and Neeson's *Run All Night*, shooting in Queens, New York, just the other day.) I group Anderson and Collet-Serra because they evince an unusual commitment to unities of time and space in an era in which much action filmmaking has ceased to value these qualities – here *Fury*'s attention to the nuts and bolts of tactical manoeuvres also deserves commendation.

Some other old reliables were off in 2014 – even the most diehard Dwayne Johnson partisans are pretending *Hercules* never happened. (Meanwhile, nobody has to pretend to forget Renny Harlin's *The Legend of Hercules*, whose lone distinction is an appearance by direct-to-video standard bearer Scott Adkins.) While usually you can count on Mark Wahlberg for a hard-nosed little movie in the winter months, to date this year he's only appeared in *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, which is neither hard-nosed nor little. Michael Bay's latest currently shares annual international box-office bragging rights with a passel of movies based

*Some old reliables were off in 2014 – even diehard Dwayne Johnson fans are pretending 'Hercules' never happened*

on Marvel Comics properties, the only one of which bears mentioning being Anthony and Joe Russo's *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, which boasts hand-to-hand scenes of surprising, bruising heft, and a not-too-shabby freeway chase to boot. (While *Guardians of the Galaxy* is not without merit, its action scenes are eminently forgettable.)

The absence of Anderson's muse Milla Jovovich from *Pompeii* opened up a power vacuum for Amazon warriors. Mixed martial-arts star Ronda Rousey was more than formidable in *The Expendables 3*, and there is something to be said for The Asylum's straight-to-video all-female 'mockbuster' take on that franchise, *Mercenaries*, with Zoë Bell, Vivica A. Fox, and Brigitte Nielsen, but I suppose people have to see your movie in order for you to qualify, so ticket sales give the crown to Scarlett Johansson, Black Widow in *The Winter Soldier* and the star of *Lucy*, Luc Besson's patently silly entry in the Kubrick karaoke contest. (Christopher Nolan has since stepped up to the mic.) Whatever my beef with Besson and Nolan, their work is certainly to be preferred to polished, professional, post-human achievements such as *Godzilla* and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, which deserve nothing less than to be left behind in rutted Sherman tank tread as we roll into the new year. ☺



**ROBERT GREENE**

Filmmaker and critic, USA

**Ne me quitte pas** *Sabine Lubbe Bakker & Niels van Koevorden*  
**Boyhood** *Richard Linklater*  
**National Gallery** *Frederick Wiseman*  
**Heaven Knows What** *Josh Safdie & Benny Safdie*  
**Living Stars** *Mariano Cohn & Gastón Duprat*  
 ● The mythical line between documentary and fiction is now all but erased. *Boyhood* was the best documentary of the year about the psychology of filmmaking and *Ne me quitte pas* had the most moving characters, fictionalised by the present camera. *Living Stars* found infinite ethnography in serialised staging and *National Gallery* found performances in aged images. *Heaven Knows What* compressed street nonfiction and melodrama into a denser, more vivid material. This merging of fiction and nonfiction is not all movies can do, but it remains my favourite cinematic trick. Forget the trendy idea of 'hybridisation', the movies have always been able to capture the dirty, clamorous heterodoxy of the real and the manufactured, and my heart still pitter-patters at the parade.

**TV** *WWE Raw* January 2014-April 2014

**J. HOBERMAN**

Critic, USA

**Goodbye to Language**  
**3D** *Jean-Luc Godard*  
**Inherent Vice** *Paul Thomas Anderson*  
**Ida** *Rawel Pawlikowski*  
**Manakamana** *Stephanie Spray & Pacho Velez*  
**Under the Skin** *Jonathan Glazer*  
 ● *Goodbye to Language* was so much the strongest movie I saw this past year that it could have occupied all five slots.

**TV** *The Americans* *Joseph Weisberg*

**ALEXANDER HORWATH**

Critic and programmer, Filmmuseum, Austria

**Bird People** *Pascale Ferran*  
**Boyhood** *Richard Linklater*  
**Clouds of Sils Maria** *Olivier Assayas*  
**Phoenix** *Christian Petzold*  
**The Wolf of Wall Street** *Martin Scorsese*  
**TV** *L'il Quinquin* *Bruno Dumont*

**NICK JAMES**Editor, *Sight & Sound*, UK

**Whiplash** *Damien Chazelle*  
**Maidan** *Sergei Loznitsa*  
**The Look of Silence**  
*Joshua Oppenheimer*  
**Citizenfour** *Laura Poitras*  
**The Grand Budapest Hotel** *Wes Anderson*

● It was not a very strong year for narrative fiction. Had I included *National Gallery* and *20,000 Days on Earth* to make it an entirely documentary list, it would be almost as representative of my reactions and

preferences. On the other hand I could have listed Alice Rohrwacher's *The Wonders*, Mia Hansen-Løve's *Eden*, Céline Sciamma's *Girlhood*, taken 20,000 *Days on Earth* and kept *Citizenfour* to make (nearly) an all-female list, because the first three additions were among the fiction features that impressed me most. Overall – and it's indicative of the times we're living through – significance has shaded out affection.

**TV** *The Knick* *Steven Soderbergh*  
 See my online piece 'Further notes on *The Knick*'.

**DAVID JENKINS**Editor, *Little White Lies*, UK

**Two Days, One Night** *Jean-Pierre Dardenne & Luc Dardenne*  
**Boyhood** *Richard Linklater*  
**Eden** *Mia Hansen-Løve*  
**Horse Money** *Pedro Costa*  
**Jauja** *Lisandro Alonso*

**TV** *Cat Watch 2014: The New Horizon Experiment* *BBC*

● I don't really watch TV but I greatly enjoyed this three-part *Horizon* series about cats and their habits. It was basically just lots of shots of cats.

**TREVOR JOHNSTON**

Critic, UK

**Boyhood** *Richard Linklater*  
**Leviathan** *Andrey Zvyagintsev*  
**Mr. Turner** *Mike Leigh*  
**Journey to the West** *Tsai Mingliang*  
**The Overnighters** *Jesse Moss*  
**TV** *Stop at Nothing: The Lance Armstrong Story* *Alex Holmes*  
 ● Thanks to BBC4's *Storyville* for screening the Armstrong doc, the definitive account of events.

**KENT JONES**

Film Society of Lincoln Center, USA

**Inherent Vice** *Paul Thomas Anderson*  
**Boyhood** *Richard Linklater*  
**Goodbye to Language**  
**3D** *Jean-Luc Godard*  
**Clouds of Sils Maria** *Olivier Assayas*  
**Horse Money** *Pedro Costa*

**DANNY LEIGH**

Critic and broadcaster, UK

**Under the Skin** *Jonathan Glazer*  
**Girlhood** *Céline Sciamma*  
**Inside Llewyn Davis** *Joel Coen & Ethan Coen*  
**A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night** *Ana Lily Amirpour*  
**20,000 Days on Earth** *Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard*

● This time round choosing five films as the year's best feels like a particular bastard. How tempting it is to name instead *Leviathan* or *Boyhood*, *Winter Sleep* or *Timbuktu*. But the films I've listed weren't just glorious in isolation, but shared a soul – a love for the lone wolf and the troublemaker. Stories of misfits and the view from the outside looking in, the result has been one of my favourite recent cinematic years. 2014: the year that punk broke?

**DENNIS LIM**

Director of programming, Film Society of Lincoln Center, USA

**Horse Money** *Pedro Costa*  
**Goodbye to Language**  
**3D** *Jean-Luc Godard*  
**Jauja** *Lisandro Alonso*  
**Saint Laurent** *Bertrand Bonello*  
**The Kindergarten Teacher** *Nadav Lapid*

**TIINA LOKK**

Director, Black Nights Film Festival, Estonia

**A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence** *Roy Andersson*  
**Birdman** *Alejandro González Iñárritu*  
**Inferno** *Vinko Möderndorfer*  
**Leviathan** *Andrey Zvyagintsev*  
**In the Sands of Babylon**  
*Mohamed Al-Daradji*  
**TV** *Hannibal* *Bryan Fuller*

**TIM LUCAS**Editor, *Video Watchdog*, USA

**Gore Vidal: The United States Of Amnesia** *Nicholas D. Wrathall*  
**The Wolf of Wall Street** *Martin Scorsese*  
**Exhibition** *Joanna Hogg*  
**See No Evil 2** *Jen Soska & Sylvia Soska*  
**The Sarnos: A Life In Dirty Movies** *Wiktor Ericsson*

● The Gore Vidal documentary was a staggering discovery; it felt like the first American film to address me honestly about my country and the state of the world, perhaps in my lifetime. Scorsese's *Wolf* brilliantly explored the influence of cinema by the TED lecture and infomercial – scandalous, sheer panache; one of his greatest films. *Exhibition* seemed to bake and rise in me overnight like a loaf of bread, a haunting, very real portrait of mid-life marriage. The Soska sisters' slasher sequel took a maudit, dead-end genre and used it to say something subversively loving about life; a joyfully manipulative theatrical experience (alas, denied this here in the US) full of life and humour, style and well-played terror, with the best directors' screen credit ever and ending with an unexpected nod to Antonioni. The Sarno film pays overdue respect to a true working-class artist of erotic cinema and the wife/partner who devoted herself to supporting his vision.

**TV** *True Detective*  
*Cary Joji Fukunaga*  
 Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson – two actors I've never liked – completely won me over here with roles they were seemingly born to play, a destiny of which the level of their game showed them very much aware. An invigorating new twist on the cop show; watching was like learning a challenging, richly epigrammatical new language.

**The Wolf of Wall Street**

**MIGUEL MARIAS**

Critic and teacher, Spain

**Sorrow and Joy** *Nils Malmros*  
**Maddened by His Absence**  
*Sandrine Bonnaire*  
**The Immigrant** *James Gray*  
**Socialism** *Peter von Bagh*  
**Not My Type** *Lucas Belvaux*

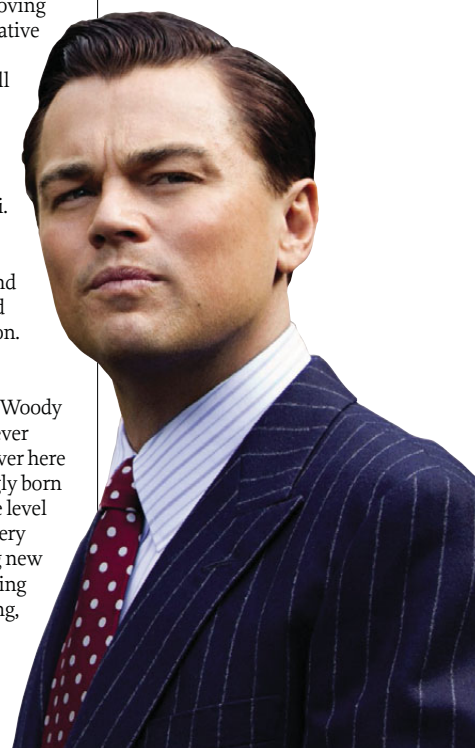
● In a year of serious disappointments (*Goodbye to Language* is the Godard movie I've found the least interesting/stimulating ever), I feel lucky to have found more than five recent films which for me are great, instead of the horrors usually praised by critics, awarded by festivals and institutions or that are very successful at the box office.

**SOPHIE MAYER**

Critic and academic, UK

**Belle Amma Asante**  
**52 Tuesdays** *Sophie Hyde*  
**The Falling** *Carol Morley*  
**Bloody Beans** *Narimane Mari*  
**Love is All: 100 Years of Love and Courtship** *Kim Longinotto*

● Three inventive historical dramas, one archival documentary, and two trans family tales: how we live then and/as now, interrelated. All of my picks this year are about time and about saying, "It's about time!" They situate feminist histories in the centre of cinema: *Belle*, in its critique of the colonial foundations of the novel and costume drama, perhaps the costume drama to end all costume drama; *Bloody Beans* stunningly relocates *Zéro de conduite* to the Algerian shoreline, where a gang of children enact (not re-enact) the Algerian War. In Carol Morley's *The Falling*, too, history is child's play: deadly serious, sensual, alive,





pressing with its enormity on emerging selves. Teenage and trans identities take shape through digital self-documentation in *52 Tuesdays*, which considers how we narrate our lives in the context of the historical events we live through. *Love Is All* bears witness to a century of cinematic documentation of love, in all its glorious diversity. Films against forgetting, reminders that we need more than a single story, and more than a singular voice telling it.

**TV Transparent** *Jill Soloway*  
While there has (rightly) been criticism of Soloway's casting, with cisgendered actor Jeffrey Tambor playing transwoman Maura, the show surrounds Maura with a diverse trans community as well as her (more familiar) self-consciously liberal Jewish family, depicting the intersection with acuity and compassion. The presence of *Chutney Popcorn*'s Nisha Ganatra's as director is a reminder that New Queer Cinema originated the sexual and psychological frankness recently associated with *Girls*.

#### DANIELA MICHEL

Director, Morelia International Film Festival, Mexico

**Birdman** *Alejandro González Iñárritu*

**The Tribe** *Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy*

**Winter Sleep** *Nuri Bilge Ceylan*

**Leviathan** *Andrey Zvyagintsev*

**Whiplash** *Damien Chazelle*

**TV Game of Thrones** *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss*

#### KATE MUIR

Critic, the *Times*, UK

**Boyhood** *Richard Linklater*

**A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence** *Roy Andersson*

**The Look of Silence**

*Joshua Oppenheimer*

**The Duke of Burgundy** *Peter Strickland*

**The Falling** *Carol Morley*

● If you look round these *S&S* Stop fives, I guarantee, as usual, that there will be very few women directors on the lists. I managed one in the form of Carol Morley, but was also longing to add Joanna Hogg's exquisite architectural-sexual hybrid, *Exhibition*. Other envelope-pushing moments from female directors this year came from Gillian Robespierre, whose abortion rom-com debuted at Sundance, and Alice Rohrwacher's Italian Cannes entry, *The Wonders*. Although I thought Amma Asante's costume drama *Belle* was bosom-heavy, politics-lite, I appreciated her decision to aim for a multiplex audience with some tough material. Lastly, for its crimson and pea-green colour palette, stiff tableaux and wicked insight, I welcomed another disturbing Austrian filmmaker: Jessica Hausner and her *Amour fou*.

**TV Olive Kitteridge** *Lisa Cholodenko*

#### KIM NEWMAN

Critic and author, UK

**La Commune (Paris, 1871)** *Peter Watkins*

**Inside Llewyn Davis** *Joel Coen & Ethan Coen*

**The Babadook** *Jennifer Kent*

**The Grand Budapest Hotel**

*Wes Anderson*

**Lucy** *Luc Besson*

● I've picked one film made in 2000 (*La Commune*), but which I only saw this year – mostly because it's had minimal exposure outside France – and my TV choice is prompted by a DVD rerelease of long-unseen work, but most of my choices are mainstreamish new releases. A problem with 'year's best' lists is that they produce consensus rather than interesting eccentricities.

**TV Sergeant Cork** *Ted Willis*

Admittedly, this was made in the early 1960s – but I only caught up with it this year.

#### ANDRÉA PICARD

Critic and programmer, 'Wavelengths' TIFF Cinematheque, Canada

**L'il Quinquin** *Bruno Dumont*

**Horse Money** *Pedro Costa*

**Goodbye to Language**

*3D Jean-Luc Godard*

**Jauja** *Lisandro Alonso*

**Kommunisten** *Jean-Marie Straub*

● I would feel remiss not to mention other films that have firmly secured my admiration, such as Ruben Ostlund's *Force Majeure*; Jessica Hausner's *Amour fou*; Eugène Green's *La Sapienza*; the Safdies' *Heaven Knows What*; Lav Diaz's *From What Is Before*; Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan's *Episode of the Sea*; the opening scene of Matias Piñeiro's *The Princess of France*, which ranks as one of the greatest beginnings of all time (the beginning of Gabriel Mascaro's *August Winds* is pretty damn great too); Sergei Loznitsa's much debated and much needed *Maidan*; Tsai Mingliang's balm to my soul, *Journey to the West*; and Hong Sang-soo's *Hill of Freedom*, whose laugh-out-loud moments provided perverse self-reflection. A handful of Canadian short experimental films ranks just as high, demonstrating bright futures ahead for Alexandre Larose, Jean-Paul Kelly, Malena Slam, Blake Williams and Stephen Broomer. Mary-Helena Clark's *The Dragon Is the Frame* continues to haunt me, and Frederick Wiseman's *National Gallery* still strikes me as profoundly disappointing. A wish for 2015: another feature from Manoel de Oliveira.

**TV L'il Quinquin** *Bruno Dumont*

Made as a miniseries for Arte, *L'il Quinquin* also ranks as my favourite film of the year, only in part due to the high surprise factor. Dumont has demonstrated brilliant versatility, his rigour and



**7 Winter Sleep** *Without doubt a formidably achieved, intellectually substantial drama... when 'Winter Sleep' comes alive, it is as powerful and suggestive as any Ceylan film.*

*Jonathan Romney, 'S&S', December 2014*



**6 The Grand Budapest Hotel** *Anderson's most complete fabrication yet, a fanatically and fantastically detailed, sugar-iced, calorie-stuffed, gleefully overripe Sachertorte of a film.*

*Philip Kemp, 'S&S', March 2014*



**5 Under the Skin** *I've been waiting most of my life for a film that combined the sensibilities of Tarkovsky and Norman J. Warren. 'Under the Skin' was worth the wait. It still haunts me, and I suspect it always will.* *Matthew Sweet*



# GETTING DOWN WITH THE KIDS

A genuinely adult approach to cinema that manages to be both engaging and enjoyable has recently become so rare as to seem almost exotic **By Jonathan Romney**



Deadly serious: Ben Affleck and Rosamund Pike in David Fincher's *Gone Girl*

One of this year's few wide-ranging cinematic debates to catch fire was started in September in the *New York Times*. In his article 'The Death of Adulthood in American Culture', A.O. Scott noted that the decline of traditional patriarchy in American culture, notably in cinema and TV, was accompanied by an eclipse of what we think of as adult themes, or images of adult behaviour. The argument was fuelled partly by statistics on the popularity of young adult fiction among older American readers, and Scott notes something that, in any case, has been true for a long time – that an attachment to childhood and adolescence today holds absolute sway in Hollywood.

While Scott ends up arguing that there's something potentially fruitful, as well as worrying, about this state of affairs, his piece helped me understand my impatience with so much recent US cinema, which tends to treat childish matters as if they were of quasi-adult importance, and to make adult matters seem trivial, even while ostensibly taking them seriously. Look how much earnest debate revolved around the supposedly game-changing nature of *Guardians of the Galaxy* within the superhero genre, and the excitement around the announcement of Marvel's slate, as if it were a new manifesto of national policy.

Conversely, there's something deeply unsatisfactory about the way certain US movies present themselves as mature and substantial.

*So much recent US cinema tends to treat childish matters as if they were of quasi-adult importance and to make adult matters seem trivial*

*Gone Girl*, widely hailed as a representation of the traumas of marriage, is really just a generic thriller, albeit a hyper-tricksy one – and one dressed up in a register of furrowed-brow solemnity designed to evoke authentic grown-up seriousness.

Admittedly, some of the best US films have been marked by a perverse attachment to child-like imagination, notably *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. And some of the worst have strained for adult seriousness; notably Jason Reitman's *Men, Women & Children*, which tries to analyse a similar syndrome to the one Scott identifies, but does it in the manner of a pedantic teacher spelling it out on the whiteboard for callow students.

Meanwhile, an adult approach – of a properly engaging and enjoyable dramatic kind – has become so rare as to seem almost exotic in recent cinema. By and large, the films I most admired in 2014 stood out by virtue of being just this kind of anomaly: among them *Leviathan*, *Mr. Turner*, *Exhibition*, *Winter Sleep* (a disappointment, yes, but one that tackles its themes with maturity, grace and wit), Mathieu Amalric's *The Blue Room* (which deals with guilt and passion in as complex a way as you'd hope from a Simenon adaptation).

There was a major American exception: *Boyhood* – seemingly just the sort of celebration of US childhood myths that Scott refers to, but in reality a film as much about parenthood and, implicitly, about many viewers' experience of it as about the ostensible coming-of-age theme. I'm happy to relish the best of the current kid stuff (*The Lego Movie* restored my faith in CGI animation), but I still expect to get my main kicks from grown-up cinema. And no, that doesn't mean I'll be queuing for *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. ☺

dark beauty strangely adaptable to television. With respective cinema and television versions, Dumont ensured compositional precision for both formats. There's no question that this work for television will endure as one of his greatest films.

## NICK PINKERTON

Critic, USA

**The Immigrant** James Gray

**Stray Dogs** Tsai Mingliang

**Boyhood** Richard Linklater

**La Sapienza** Eugène Green

**Timbuktu** Abderrahmane Sissako

● Apologies are due. Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is lovely and wistful, but with *Boyhood* locked in, I couldn't skew too heavily in favour of Texan filmmakers. There was also a disconcerting amount of able independent moviemaking from New York City this year, films including *It Felt Like Love*, *Heaven Knows What*, *Listen Up Philip*, *Hellaware*, *Wild Canaries*, *The Mend* and *Actress*, which shares documentary honors with *Ne me quitte pas*, *Manakamana*, and Frederick Wiseman's *National Gallery*. (Of course it's great.) Elsewhere on the American indie scene, both *Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter* and *Buzzard* have staying power. I've only seen (and approved of) half of Clint Eastwood's one-two this year, *Jersey Boys*, so the verdict remains out, but I can endorse the eminent Abel Ferrara's diptych of *Welcome to New York* and *Pasolini*, which cancelled one another out in top five-ing consideration. (Ditto Olivier Assayas/ Mia Hansen-Løve's *Clouds of Sils Maria/ Eden*.) I'm afraid *The Immigrant* and *Stray Dogs* edged Pedro Costa's very major *Horse Money* in the grinding poverty stakes, but only just. Additional hat tips are due to Gabriel Abrantes's *Taprobana*, shorts under the auspices of the Borscht Corp., and the *Dumb and Dumber To* trailer. The rest was mostly hot garbage.

**TV Eastbound & Down, season four**

*Ben Best, Danny McBride & Jody Hill*

It actually came out in late 2013, but I only caught up with it this year. The only HBO programme that matters, as brusque, rude, and ultimately affectionate as pre-Code Raoul Walsh, and a hysterical commentary on the motivational role of cliché in American life. Taken as a whole, one of the 21st century's handful of confirmed masterpieces.

## JOHN POWERS

Critic, *Vogue*, USA

**Goodbye to Language**

**3D** Jean-Luc Godard

**Boyhood** Richard Linklater

**The Grand Budapest**

**Hotel** Wes Anderson

**Timbuktu** Abderrahmane Sissako

**Leviathan** Andrey Zvyagintsev

**TV Transparent** Jill Soloway





# THE HORROR, THE HORROR

Traditional supernatural monster characters were back with a vengeance in 2014 after a period dominated by extremes of human unpleasantness **By Kim Newman**



The book of revelation: Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook*

Despite the fairly lacklustre showing of classic monsters in *I, Frankenstein* and *Dracula Untold* – which, among many other failings, forget to be horror films – there has been a welcome revival of traditional supernatural monster characters after a period dominated by extremes of human unpleasantness. Perhaps surprisingly, 2014 saw a minor revival of small-scale werewolf movies, including the thoughtful character study *Late Phases*, the entertaining British western *Blood Moon*, the amusingly retro *WolfCop*, the werewolf-styled human predators of *Cub* (aka *Welp*) and the basic schlock of *Werewolf Rising*. If *Dracula* himself fared ill in *Dracula: The Dark Prince* as well as *Dracula Untold* and teenage bloodsuckers flagged in *Vampire Academy*, more unusual vampires were well represented by the hipster likes of Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive*, Ana Lily Amirpour's Iranian-American *A Girl Walks Home at Night* and Derek Lee and Clif Prowse's found-footage picture *Afflicted*. Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead combined several manners of monster for *Spring*, then used the result as the focus for a peculiar romance rather than a horror story.

The found-footage cycle is constantly on the point of dying out but persists because of its appeal to filmmakers with limited resources. If the boom mic gets into frame or the camerawork is shaky, then that's corroborative evidence rather than the prompt for a pricey retake. The *Paranormal Activity* series yielded a spin-off, *The Marked Ones*; two found-footage *Rosemary's Baby* rethinks (*Devil's Due*, *Delivery*) jostled with an actual forthcoming remake; Hammer Films pitched in with the 1970s-set ghost mock-doc *The Quiet Ones*; haunted catacombs were explored

in *As Above, So Below* and computer desktops in *The Den* and *Open Windows*; Bigfoot was pestered in *Exists*; and those who were awaiting a found-footage mummy movie were gifted with *Day of the Mummy*. The most impressive, disturbing found-footage horror of the year is Patrick Brice and Mark Duplass's very simple *Creep*, which shifts mercurially between uncomfortable comedy and ratcheting suspense – and also, without recourse to the supernatural, joins the werewolf pack with its nastily memorable masked menace, Peachfuzz. The stumbling zombie subgenre, also perpetually written off but persistent, yielded a trickle of oddities like the football-themed *Goal of the Dead* and the slacker road movie *The Battery*. *Dead Within* and *Open Grave* melded their zombie-infection outbreaks with other recent subgenres, the stuck-at-home crack-up and the group-of-characters-with-amnesia-wake-up-in-a-pickle puzzle drama. The Ebola crisis prompted myriad comparisons with the beginnings of zombie movies, and will doubtless inspire next year's crop of apocalypses.

Ghosts loom large in contemporary scare cinema, often manifesting as supernatural or demonic presences rather than strictly representing the spirits of the dead, which has encouraged filmmakers to come up with fresh, inventive hauntings. Even if the killer doll of *Annabelle* seemed to be wearing out the welcome of medium-budget studio spookiness, there are more worthwhile, thematically resonant scares to be had from the malign mirror of Mike Flanagan's *Oculus*, the troubling children's book of Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook*, and the relentless pursuer of David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows*. ☹



**NAMAN RAMACHANDRAN**

Critic and programmer, UK/India

**Black Coal, Thin Ice** *Diao Yinan*

**Gone Girl** *David Fincher*

**The Tribe** *Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy*

**Highway** *Imtiaz Ali*

**Haider** *Vishal Bhardwaj*

**TV You're the Worst** *Stephen Falk*

● Overall, despite formal experiments such as *Boyhood* and *The Tribe*, and ambitious ventures such as *Interstellar*, 2014 felt like a poor year for cinema, and this is because it hasn't produced anything approaching the magnificence of *The Great Beauty*. Mainstream Bollywood took giant strides forward, placing child sexual abuse front and centre in *Highway*, and relocating *Hamlet* within the Kashmir conflict with great success in *Haider*.

**TONY RAYNS**

Critic and programmer, UK

**Ow** *Suzuki Yohei*

**The Golden Era** *Ann Hui*

**Hwayi: A Monster Boy** *Jang Junhwan*

**2030** *Nguyen-Vo Nghiem-Minh*

**Goodbye to Language**

**3D** *Jean-Luc Godard*

● Suzuki's *Ow* is not only the outstanding Japanese indie of the year but the most interesting and provocative Japanese film since Oshima's late-1960s heyday, period. Ann Hui's *The Golden Era* is not only brilliant historiography but also a fascinating rethink of the biopic. *Hwayi: A Monster Boy* comes a full ten years after Jang Junhwan's debut feature *Save the Green Planet*, but was worth the long wait: it combines acutely felt physical and mental pain with sardonic political satire and black humour. Nguyen-Vo's 2030 suggests entirely new directions for 'Third World' cinema with its blend of sci-fi, eco-catastrophe and mystery thriller. And Godard's *Goodbye to Language* is both demented and brilliant. I haven't yet seen the new Andrey Zvyagintsev and Alexei German films (and imagine either might be extraordinary) so I'm focusing my choices on the most groundbreaking and accomplished films from East Asia which I saw this year.

**KONG RITHDEE**

Critic, the Bangkok Post, Thailand

**Jauja** *Lisandro Alonso*

**Goodbye to Language**

**3D** *Jean-Luc Godard*

**Manakamana** *Stephanie*

*Spray & Pachó Velez*

**Boyhood** *Richard Linklater*

**Ida** *Pawel Pawlikowski*

● When an 84-year-old filmmaker has made a film like *Goodbye to Language*, we know cinema is still in fine health (at least in the certain corridors of this vast asylum). Image as bliss, narrative as Lego-land, metaphor as life and vice versa – the primitive language is at





**=3 Horse Money** Brazen when it comes to bending cinema's usual rules about the time and space(s) that characters occupy... a collision between cinematic history and authentic stories of suffering. Jason Anderson, 'S&S', December 2014



**=3 Leviathan** Balances the universality the director has always striven for with a brilliantly etched microcosm of the lawlessness that grips Russia today, where patronage, profiteering and power are intertwined. Ian Christie, 'S&S', December 2014



**2 Goodbye to Language** Godard's retina-invigorating ciné-poem... the densest but also the most cinema-bending film on the Riviera, one which made the entire audience squint, blink and panic in unison. Isabel Stevens, 'S&S', July 2014

peace and at war with the digital one. Which is why Lisandro Alonso's *Jauja*, too, is such a marvellous experience: it shows that film is a medium that can lock up a history (or memories or dreams or nightmares) inside it, then release it in all the splendour of Patagonian skies. Both films also show that mischief-making is in fact philosophising of the highest order. Meantime, the purity of *Manakamana* distils reality and yet extends its implication far beyond the tired label of 'ethnographic doc' – and far beyond the soundproof cabin of the eternal Nepalese cable car. Cinema as latitudes on the faces of unknown strangers; *Manakamana* and *Boyhood* illustrate that with the same sense of wonder at different ends of 21st-century filmmaking.

#### JONATHAN ROMNEY

Critic, UK

**The Tribe** Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy

**Mr. Turner** Mike Leigh

**Leviathan** Andrey Zvyagintsev

**Exhibition** Joanna Hogg

**The Grand Budapest**

**Hotel** Wes Anderson

● The film that most impressed me came out of the blue: the barely classifiable Ukrainian ensemble piece *The Tribe*. Set in a school for deaf teenagers, it uses its subject and young deaf cast to reimagine the language of sight and sound (or the absence of sound) in cinema to startlingly original effect; you watch and listen in a way that's entirely fresh and unfamiliar. This makes it perhaps the most genuinely participative film of 2014. It comes to our cinemas next year; there will be a backlash, I suspect, but it's bound to be an interesting one. It also reminds us of the vigour of film culture in different parts of the former USSR – other key films of the year being Sergei Loznitsa's documentary *Maidan*, Zvyagintsev's quiet but powerfully contestatory *Leviathan* and – out on a planet of its own – *Hard to Be a God*, the brilliantly deranged final testament of the late visionary Alexei German. Meanwhile two films defied all the accepted wisdom and turned 3D on its head to brilliantly contrarian and anti-illusionistic effect: *Goodbye to Language* and *The Lego Movie*. The future of 3D, I like to think, will be Legodardian.

**TV L'il Quinquin** Bruno Dumont

Perhaps I'm cheating, since Bruno Dumont's comedy was made as a TV miniseries but has also shown as a five-hour self-contained film at festivals. That this director should turn out to have a funny bone is the great revelation, but *L'il Quinquin* is pure Dumont – not least in its compassionate but unindulgent revelation of the squalid side of human nature. Intensely watchable, original – and a knockabout pleasure too.

#### JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Critic, USA

**Horse Money** Pedro Costa

**Farewell to Language** Jean-Luc Godard

**Locke** Steven Knight

**The Owners** Adilkhan Yerzhanov

**Citizenfour** Laura Poitras

● Sadly, I've had to omit two exceptional Iranian films (Reza Mirkarimi's *Today*, Sepideh Farsi's *Red Rose*), two exceptional performances by Juliette Binoche (Fred Schepisi's *Words and Pictures*, Olivier Assayas's *Clouds of Sils Maria*), Alain Resnais's final feature (*Life of Riley*) and the belated appearance of Orson Welles's unfinished and ancient but still sprightly *Too Much Johnson*. But my top five continue to provoke and expand. *Horse Money* and *The Owners* need to travel more, and *Locke*, which feels like a classic heroic western, deserves to be recognised as more than just a stunt or tour de force. *Goodbye to Language* reinvents 3D and cinema, and *Horse Money*, like *The Owners*, *Citizenfour* and *Today* (not to mention *Borgen*, in its own fashion), reinvents both the world and its moral prerogatives.

**TV Borgen** Adam Price

I'm late in catching up with this, but have recently and profitably breezed through all three seasons.

#### SUKHDEV SANDHU

Critic, USA/UK

**Hands of Bresson** Kogonada

**Boyhood** Richard Linklater

**Majub's Journey** Eva Knopf

**Estate, a Reverie** Andrea

Luka Zimmerman

**Lettres du voyant** Louis Henderson

● *Hands of Bresson* is a work of archival criticism that forgoes the language of rigour for that of rapture. A gorgeously lyrical example of the internet-assisted possibilities of post-production art, here are hands – votive, tender, purloining, trembling – that make me want to raise my own hands in gratitude to this mysterious poet. A biography of a ghost, an essayistic meditation on the concept of film extras, a pleasingly non-polemical exploration on 20th-century Germany and its mostly forgotten imperial history, Knopf's debut is a portrait, rich in ellipses and necessary speculations, of Mohamed Husen who appeared, always in fleeting ancillary roles, in Nazi-era German films. Andrea Zimmerman's collaboratively produced *Estate* is a tribute to the values and vitalities of social housing, a time capsule that documents the lives and lived resistance of East Londoners about to be evicted, a threnody that refuses to imagine that its subject is – or could ever be – dead. Picking up where the Black Audio Film Collective's *The Last Angel of History* (1996) left off, this formally guileful, epistolary essay about Sakawa,





➔ a practice/ subculture involving voodoo-assisted Ghanaian spam artists. An experimental take on the trope of the Third World wastescape, Henderson positions the African gleaners as landscape hackers and avant-archaeologists.

#### TV World Cup 2014

Germany's 7-1 victory over Brazil was truly sublime – shocking, larynx-decimating, befuddling, oddly upsetting... and beautiful.

#### VIRGINIE SÉLAVY

Editor, *Electric Sheep*, UK

**Nymph()**maniac *Lars von Trier*

**The Duke of Burgundy** *Peter Strickland*

**The Babadook** *Jennifer Kent*

**Moebius** *Kim Ki-duk*

**A Girl Walks Home Alone at**

**Night** *Ana Lily Amirpour*

● 2014 has been a great year for provocative, potent and fiercely idiosyncratic cinema, starting in February with Lars von Trier's bold magnum opus of sex, sin and sorrow, *Nymph()*maniac. Kim Ki-duk's *Moebius* was a startling demonstration of the circularity of desire that could be seen as either a grotesque farce or a terrible tragedy or both. Jennifer Kent crafted a wonderfully creepy, moving and elegant story about the monsters born of grief and loneliness in *The Babadook*. Ana Lily Amirpour's black-and-white Iranian vampire tale set to a western-inspired soundtrack was an equally striking and stylish debut. And Peter Strickland delivered his best film so far with *The Duke of Burgundy*, a masterful, sensual, hypnotic study of love and domination.

TV *True Detective* *Cary Joji Fukunaga*

#### FERNANDA SOLOZARNO

Critic, *Letras Libres* magazine, Mexico

**Birdman** *Alejandro González Iñárritu*

**The Wolf of Wall Street** *Martin Scorsese*

**La isla mínima** *Alberto Rodríguez*

**Gente de bien** *Franco Lolli*

**Whiplash** *Damien Chazelle*

● I just realised my round-up is a list of the underdog films of the year. That is, with the exception of *Birdman* – which is everything but a struggling film (but happens to tell the story of a man confronting failure). With its long shots, spatial and temporal unity and a poisonous eye for self-important characters, it is a departure from Iñárritu's characteristic traits. Still, it feels like his most personal and even self-referential film – and, to me, his best. Speaking of self-referentiality, *The Wolf of Wall Street* felt like the perfect balance between auteurship and reinvention: critical and exhilarating, it was unfairly overlooked. A much smaller production, *La isla mínima* is a stunningly atmospheric crime film set in post-Franco Spain. Hopefully it will get the recognition it was denied at the San Sebastián Film Festival.

Deceptively simple, the Colombian film *Gente de bien* does a great job at illustrating the kind of classism that is specific to Latin America. There are no obvious victims or villains, but strong post-colonial structures that shape everyday life. Last, but not least, *Whiplash* is one of the best "tough mentor/obsessive pupil" films to date and a sharp exploration of the link between art and self-laceration.

TV *The Knick* *Steven Soderbergh*

#### KATE STABLES

Critic, UK

**Mr. Turner** *Mike Leigh*

**Nymph()**maniac: **Volume 1**

*Lars von Trier*

**Boyhood** *Richard Linklater*

**The Grand Budapest**

**Hotel** *Wes Anderson*

**The Lego Movie** *Phil Lord*

*& Christopher Miller*

TV *True Detective* *Cary Joji Fukunaga*

#### ISABEL STEVENS

Production editor, *Sight & Sound*, UK

**Amour fou** *Jessica Hausner*

**Citizenfour** *Laura Poitras*

**National Gallery** *Frederick Wiseman*

**The Tribe** *Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy*

**The Wind Rises** *Miyazaki Hayao*

TV *Utopia* *Dennis Kelly, Marc Munden,*

*Wayne Che Yip & Alex Garcia Lopez*

#### FRANCINE STOCK

Critic and broadcaster, UK

**Under the Skin** *Jonathan Glazer*

**The Past** *Asghar Farhadi*

**20,000 Days on Earth** *Iain*

*Forsyth & Jane Pollard*

**Return to Homs** *Talal Derki*

**Boyhood** *Richard Linklater*

#### MATTHEW SWEET

Broadcaster, UK

**Under the Skin** *Jonathan Glazer*

**The Wind Rises** *Miyazaki Hayao*

**Maps to the Stars** *David Cronenberg*

**Still Life** *Uberto Pasolini*

**Maleficent** *Robert Stromberg*

● I suppose I knew I'd been waiting for most of my life for a film that combined the sensibilities of Andrei Tarkovsky and Norman J. Warren. *Under the Skin* was worth the wait. It still haunts me, and I suspect it always will.

#### SATO TADAO

Critic, Japan

**Child's Pose** *Calin Peter Netzer*

**'Til Madness Do Us Part** *Wang Bing*

**Ida** *Pawel Pawlikowski*

**The Little House** *Yoji Yamada*

**The Lunchbox** *Ritesh Batra*

#### AMY TAUBIN

Critic, USA

**Goodbye to Language**

**3D** *Jean-Luc Godard*

**Boyhood** *Richard Linklater*

**Whiplash** *Damien Chazelle*

**Dreams Are Colder Than**

**Death** *Arthur Jafa*

**Tales of the Grim Sleeper**

*Nick Broomfield*

● It was an excellent year for non-studio films. Search out *Dreams Are Colder Than Death*, Arthur Jafa's exquisite, personal mangle of voices and images that brilliantly evokes the experience of blackness in America. I wish I had room for another astonishing debut, Yann Demange's '71, and the masterful, revelatory *Mr. Turner*, but they will certainly get lots of love from others here. Not quite top-five material but a more than promising debut, July Jung's haunting *A Girl at My Door* is guaranteed to provoke heated sexual-politics debate. TV *The Knick* *Steven Soderbergh* Virtuoso, auteurist television that was smarter than its often-clichéd hospital-genre script. A very honourable mention goes to the third season of *Sherlock*.

#### GINETTE VINCEDEAU

Critic and academic, UK/France

**Girlhood** *Céline Sciamma*

**Suzanne** *Katell Quillévéré*

**Like Father, Like Son** *Hirokazu Koreeda*

**The Wolf of Wall Street** *Martin Scorsese*

**Maestro** *Léa Fazer*

● Having made my choices quite quickly from the films I remember enjoying most this year, I am pleased to see that, although this was not intentional, three out of five are directed by women – the fact that these are the three French ones is not surprising and the point needs to be made again and again that France bucks the trend in being the country with the highest proportion of female directors. I also like the fact that the three female-directed French films are so diverse in genre and scope, from cinephilia (*Maestro*) to intimate psychological drama (*Suzanne*) to a bold portrayal of an all-black female milieu in the Paris suburbs (*Girlhood*). This being said, two exciting cinematic events of the year were Brigitte Bardot's 80th birthday on 28 September and the release of the 'uncensored' version of *Le Jour se lève*.

#### CATHERINE WHEATLEY

Critic and academic, UK

**Ida** *Pawel Pawlikowski*

**Calvary** *John Michael McDonagh*

**The Falling** *Carol Morley*

**Leviathan** *Andrey Zvyagintsev*

**Exhibition** *Joanna Hogg*

● There's something of a theme to three of my selections – *Calvary*, *Ida* and *Leviathan* are all films that have a strong religious bent, which is a subject I've written about within the magazine ('Holy Motors', *SS&S*, December). But they are also films that are extremely compassionate towards their subjects, and towards the devastation that history wreaks upon individuals. Each, in different ways, combines minor and major modes in a very finely calibrated manner. Carol Morley and Joanna Hogg are directors whose work I have long loved and who have produced two startling films this year, both of which show continuities with their earlier work alongside a distinct development of style. It's always nerve-racking in a way when a filmmaker you admire releases a new work, but I'm happy to say that I was surprised and delighted by both *The Falling* and *Exhibition* this year.

TV *Orange Is the New Black*,

**season two** *Jenji Kohan*

I haven't seen *True Detective*, which I suspect will come up trumps in the year's best television series. But it would have to be something pretty special indeed to overwhelm the affection I have for this series, which is funny, sad, outrageous, beautifully scripted and genuinely interested in offering a diverse portfolio of women's experiences. It's a gem. 🍷



1 **Boyhood** *Richard Linklater's* film hinges on the tension between past, present and future and wears its long production and philosophical heft lightly. It feels as effortless as breathing. Precious little happens, yet everything does. *Ryan Gilbey*



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# SOME NOTES ABOUT THE ART OF FALLING

*In the century that has passed since The Tramp first strolled into the frame on cinema screens, the world has changed deeply. Yet Charlie Chaplin's early films have lost none of their surprise or humour or bite or illumination, and their relevance now seems more urgent than ever*

**By John Berger**

**He sees what's happening** in the world as something both pitiless and inexplicable. And he takes this for granted. His energy is concentrated on the immediate, on getting by and on finding a way out to something a bit brighter. He has observed that there are many circumstances and situations in life which occur and reoccur and are therefore, despite their strangeness, familiar. Since early childhood he has been familiar with dictums, jokes, hints of advice, tricks of the trade, dodges, which refer to these recurrent daily puzzles of life. And so he faces them with a proverbial foreknowledge of what he's up against. He's seldom nonplussed.

Here are some of the axioms of the proverbial foreknowledge he has acquired.

The arse is the centre of the male body; it's where you first kick your opponent, and it's what you most frequently fall on when knocked down.

Women are another army. Watch above all their eyes.

The powerful are always hefty and nervous.

Preachers love only their own voices.

There are so many disabled around that wheelchairs may need a traffic controller.

The words are missing to name or explain the daily run of trouble, unmet needs and frustrated desire.

Most people have no time of their own yet they don't realise this. Pursued, they pursue their lives.

You, like them, count for nothing, until you step aside and stick your neck out; then your companions will stop short and gaze in wonder.



## **FUNNY BUSINESS**

Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle once remarked prophetically that his friend Chaplin was a 'complete comic genius, undoubtedly the only one of our time who will be talked about a century from now'







*Across the planet  
300 million  
men, women  
and children  
are looking for  
work in order  
to have the  
minimal means  
for survival.  
The Tramp is no  
longer singular*



And in the silence of that wonder there is every conceivable word of every mother tongue. You've created a hiatus of recognition.

The ranks of men and women possessing nothing or almost nothing can offer a spare hole of exactly the right size for a little fellow to hide in.

The digestive system is often beyond our control.

A hat is not a protection from the weather; it's a mark of rank.

When a man's trousers fall down it's a humiliation; when a woman's skirts are uplifted it's an illumination.

In a pitiless world a walking stick may be a companion.

Other axioms apply to location and settings.

To enter most buildings money – or evidence of money – is required.

Staircases are slides.

Windows are for throwing things or climbing through.

Balconies are posts from which to scramble down or from which to drop things.

Wild nature is a hiding place.

All chases are circular.

Any step taken is likely to be a mistake, so take it with style to distract from the probable shit.

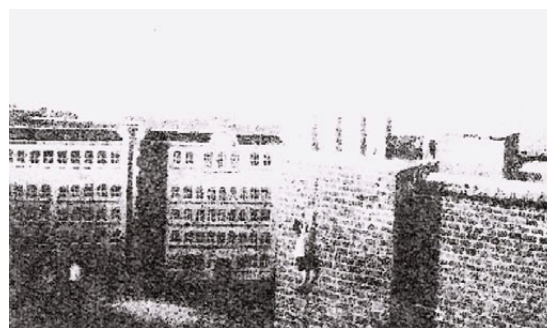
Something like this was part of the proverbial knowledge of a kid, around ten years old – ten the first time your age has two numerals – hanging out in South London, in Lambeth, at the very beginning of the 20th century.

A lot of this childhood was spent in public institutions, first a workhouse and then a school for destitute children. Hannah, his mother, to whom he was deeply attached, was incapable of looking after him. During much of her life she was confined to a lunatic asylum. She came from a South London milieu of music-hall performers.



Public institutions for the destitute, such as workhouses and schools for derelict children resembled, still resemble, prisons, in the way they are organised and in the way they are laid out. Penitentiaries for Losers. When I think of the ten-year-old kid and what he experienced, I think of the paintings of a certain friend of mine today.

Michael Quanne, until he was in his 40s, spent more than half his life in prison, sentenced for repeated petty larcenies. Whilst in prison he began to paint. Below are two of his paintings.



His subjects are stories of happenings in the outside free world, as seen and imagined by a prisoner. A striking feature of these paintings is the anonymity of the places, of the locations depicted in them. The imagined figures, the protagonists are vivid, expressive and energetic, but the street-corners, the imposing buildings, the exits and entrances, the skylines and alleyways, among which the figures find themselves, are barren, faceless, lifeless, indifferent. Nowhere is there a hint or trace of any mother-touch.

We are looking at places in the outside world through the transparent but impenetrable and pitiless glass of a window in a prison-cell.



The ten-year-old grows up to be an adolescent and then a young man. Short, very thin, with piercing blue eyes. He dances and sings. He also mimes. He mimes inventing elaborate dialogues between the features of his face, the gestures of his fastidious hands and the air surrounding him, which is free and belongs nowhere. As a performer he becomes a master pickpocket, hoicking laughter out of pocket after pocket of confusion and despair. He directs films and plays in them. Their sets are barren, anonymous and motherless.

Dear Reader, you've guessed whom I'm referring to, haven't you? Charlie Chaplin, The Little Fellow, The Tramp.

While his team were shooting *The Gold Rush* in 1924, there was an agitated discussion going on in the studio

DRAWING BY JOHN BERGER



about the storyline. And a fly kept distracting their attention, so Chaplin, furious, asked for a swatter and tried to kill it. He failed. After a moment the fly landed on the table beside him, within easy reach. He picked up the swatter to swipe at it, then abruptly stopped and put down the swatter. When the others asked “Why?”, he looked at them and said: “It isn’t the same fly.”

A decade earlier Roscoe Arbuckle, one of Chaplin’s favourite ‘hefty’ collaborators, remarked that his mate Chaplin was a “complete comic genius, undoubtedly the only one of our time who will be talked about a century from now.”

The century has passed and what ‘Fatty’ Arbuckle said has turned out to be true. During that century the world deeply changed – economically, politically, socially. With the invention of ‘talkies’ and the new edifice of Hollywood, the cinema also changed. Yet the early Chaplin films have lost none of their surprise or humour or bite or illumination. More than that, their relevance seems closer, more urgent than ever before: they are an intimate commentary on the 21st century in which we are living.

How is this possible? I want to offer two insights. The first concerns Chaplin’s proverbial view of the world as described above, and the second concerns his genius as a clown, which paradoxically owed so much to the tribulations of his childhood.

Today the economic global tyranny of speculative financial capitalism, which uses national governments (and their politicians) as its slave-masters, and the world media as its dope-distributor, this tyranny whose sole aim is profit and ceaseless accumulation, imposes on us a view and pattern of life which is hectic, precarious, merciless and inexplicable. And this view of life is even closer to the ten-year-old’s proverbial view of the world than was life at the time the early Chaplin films were shot.

In this morning’s newspapers there is a report that Evo Morales, the uncynical and relatively open-hearted president of Bolivia has proposed a new law which will make it legal for kids to start working as soon as they are ten years old. Nearly a million Bolivian kids are already doing so in order to contribute to their families having enough to eat. His law will grant them a little legal protection.

Six months ago, in the sea around the Italian island of Lampedusa, 400 immigrants from Africa and the Middle East were drowned in an unseaworthy boat whilst trying to enter Europe clandestinely in the hope of finding jobs. Across the planet 300 million men, women and children are looking for work in order to have the minimal means for survival. The Tramp is no longer singular.

The extent of the apparently inexplicable increases day by day. The politics of universal suffrage have become meaningless because the discourse of national politicians no longer has any connection with what they do or can do. The fundamental decisions determining today’s world are all being taken by financial speculators and their agencies, who are nameless and

politically speechless. As the ten-year-old presumed: “Words are missing to name or explain the daily run of trouble, unmet needs and frustrated desire.”



The clown knows that life is cruel. The ancient jester’s motley brightly coloured costume was already a joke about his usually melancholy expression. The clown is used to loss. Loss is his prologue.

The energy of Chaplin’s antics is repetitive and incremental. Each time he falls, he gets back on to his feet as a new man. A new man who is both the same man *and* a different man. After each fall the secret of his buoyancy is his multiplicity.

The same multiplicity enables him to hold on to his next hope although he is used to his hopes being repeatedly shattered. He undergoes humiliation after humiliation with equanimity. Even when he counter-attacks, he does so with a hint of regret and with equanimity. Such equanimity renders him invulnerable – invulnerable to the point of seeming immortal. We, sensing this immortality in our hopeless circus of events, acknowledge it with our laughter.

In Chaplin’s world Laughter is immortality’s nickname.



There are photos of Chaplin when he was in his mid-80s. Looking at them one day I found the expression on his face familiar. Yet I didn’t know why. Later it came to me. I checked it out. His expression is like Rembrandt’s in one of his last self-portraits: *Self-portrait as Zeuxis Laughing*.

“I’m only a little nickel comedian,” he says. “All I ask is to make people laugh.” ☺

**Thanks to the Cinema Museum for its assistance:**

[www.cinemamuseum.org.uk/](http://www.cinemamuseum.org.uk/)

*The energy of Chaplin’s antics is repetitive and incremental. Each time he falls, he gets back on to his feet as a new man. A new man who is both the same man and a different man*



VIENNALE: OVERVIEW

## HANS OVER THE CITY

By skipping the hoopla of red carpets and celebrities, Vienna's film festival can focus on what really matters: the cinematic image

By Kieron Corless

A couple of years ago, when the Viennale celebrated its 50th anniversary, several other film festivals around the world programmed special strands in its honour. It was an unprecedented display of respect and affectionate solidarity, testament to a recognisable sensibility and stance fashioned, in their different styles, by Alexander Horwath and latterly Hans Hurch during their respective tenures as artistic director. (Horwath now runs the Vienna Filmmuseum, which always puts on a large retrospective at the same time as the festival, this year on the colossus John Ford.)

The Viennale's reputation and appeal rest on its determination to do things right, a commitment expressed in a number of ways: a rigorous approach to screening films in their original formats (as does the Filmmuseum); the refusal of hierarchical distinctions and sidebar ghettos – the catalogue divides simply into alphabetised features, documentaries and shorts (plus tributes and special programmes), with each long film, irrespective of the director's stature, allotted a full page; and the healthy disregard for a competition and red carpet (in other words, the too prevalent festival hoopla and genuflecting before celebrity).

There's more – in fact, plenty more – but, in sum, it's all about a quality of engagement with the cinematic image in all its variations, along with a certain attitude suggested in part by Hurch's unswerving allegiance to particular directors (notably Straub and Godard, but others would probably include Farocki, Costa, Rousseau and Wyborny). If that sounds highminded or exclusive, I'd argue otherwise; I don't think I've been to a festival as warmly convivial, easygoing and accessible. Directors I've spoken to love it for the full support and attention their films always receive.

This year's programme included a profile of the fascinating Algerian director Tariq Teguia and a tantalising historical survey of the 16mm format – both are highlighted in the following pages. There's also a report on two new James Benning films that premiered at the Viennale on the S&S website. In terms of recent films, the usual suspects currently pounding the festival trail were ushered in – Alonso, Costa, Green et al – but what distinguishes the Viennale is the warm welcome it provides for cinema's more idiosyncratic, disruptive and often overlooked or under-appreciated elements. Gonzalo Pelayo in 2013 and Manuel Mozos in 2012 are two cases in point.

Mozos was back for this edition with a beautifully constructed tribute to his friend and colleague João Bénard da Costa, who died in 2009, called *Others Will Love the Things I Loved*. Da Costa was the director of the Portuguese



Poetry in motion: Nira (Sarit Larry) with her genius charge in Nadav Lapid's *Kindergarten Teacher*

*In his strange, vital film Lapid creates shaded, volatile characters and unsettles the viewer with what he calls 'primitive' camerawork*

Cinematheque for 18 years and a much-loved film critic of rare distinction. Mozos has assembled from his writings a series of poetic, philosophical reflections on memory, love, mortality and inevitably cinema, given voice by Da Costa's son over shots of paintings, photographs and, mainly, places to which he held a strong attachment. Interleaved are scenes from films that obsessed Da Costa, especially *Johnny Guitar* and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, played on a Steenbeck operated by Mozos as he, too, plumbs their mysteries. It's a film about transmission of various kinds, which itself becomes a transmitter of Da Costa's legacy, thanks in part to the brilliance of the editing and sound design but mainly because Mozos is unwilling to resort to talking heads or to simplify and reduce the man and his perceptions into an easily assimilable package.



Look back in anguish: *Sorrow and Joy*

That was the best documentary I saw, but there were two stand-out features as well. Israeli director Nadav Lapid's follow-up to his much-lauded debut *Policeman is Kindergarten Teacher* and, like the earlier film, homes in on a decidedly off-kilter female character at war with what Lapid calls "the spirit of our times". Nira (the enigmatic non-professional Sarit Larry) is the titular teacher; when one of her charges, a five-year-old boy, suddenly reveals himself to be a startlingly original poet, she takes it upon herself to protect his talent from the depredations of a vulgarly materialistic world in part represented by the boy's businessman father. Lapid creates shaded, volatile characters and constantly unsettles the viewer with what he calls 'primitive' camerawork; it's a strange, vital film that makes me keen to see where the director goes next.

*Sorrow and Joy* is directed by Nils Malmros, virtually unknown outside his native Denmark, at least until a 2014 retrospective in Rotterdam stirred a lot of interest. Like most of his films, *Sorrow and Joy* is semi-autobiographical, based on a real-life incident in the 1980s when Malmros's wife suffered a psychological breakdown and killed their baby. Somehow their marriage survived. But knowing this doesn't really matter: the film stands alone as a quietly tormented struggle to understand and overcome an immensely painful burden and carry on living with oneself and another. The tone is hushed and subdued, the style restrained on every level (we don't see the killing, only the aftermath). There are no grand gestures or sentimentality, just a stripping away of all unnecessary elements to get to the core of an experience. It's a film that genuinely shocks, jolting you into a profoundly dark place yet inhabiting and confronting it with an almost unimaginable wisdom and humility. I have never seen anything quite like *Sorrow and Joy* and, who knows, maybe it's best that way. 🍷



VIENNALE: DIRECTOR PROFILE

# LOST IN LA MADRAGUE

Algerian filmmaker Tariq Teguia's camera is forever restless, reflecting the uncertain experience of a new generation of young Arabs

By Michael Pattison

Tariq Teguia's cinema is one of movement. In the Algerian's first two features especially, the most prevalent kind of shot is a travelling one. His debut feature, *Rome Rather Than You* (2006), opens on a darkening sky, with the camera looking upward at the same time as it's drawing back – in retreat, perhaps, though not without a feeling of melancholic optimism.

It's an apt metaphor: the film follows Kamel (Rachid Amrani) and Zina (Samira Kaddour), a young Algiers-based couple in search of an elusive sailor who can forge passports and smuggle them into Europe. Their quest unfolds in a series of restless takes: a sideways track of Kamel as he walks around the walled perimeter of a building; a crab-like crawl along a hilltop path overlooking the city's eerily lit port; a car-fixed shot as our protagonists drive through a labyrinth of dilapidated dwellings in the coastal district of La Madrague, one of them asking, finally, if they're lost.

Lost indeed: Teguia's characters are on the move even when they're not, for displacement can be economic as well as geographic. Algeria's 1991-2002 civil war – a painful and prolonged reminder of its own anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s – cost up to 150,000 lives and left hundreds of thousands more uprooted and impoverished. Teguia's short film *Haçla*, made in 2002, lends a platform to a group of impassioned young males stuck in a jobless rut in the Ain Bénian suburb of Algiers. Their anger is directed at the region's ruinously high unemployment levels and their unresponsive government. In a moment in *Rome Rather Than You*, two males pass each other in the street, one asking the



Always on the move: *Ferrailles d'attente*

other in simple monosyllables for work.

*Haçla* too contains a brief travelling shot, with a camera looking sideways out of a car as the vehicle moves in a circular motion around rundown structures in the distance. The same movement also dominates *Ferrailles d'attente*, the similarly themed essayistic short Teguia made in 1998. There's something deliberately restrictive about these self-made ring-roads: in each case, a passing landscape is captured at a suspended, circumferential remove, with the filmmaker and his audience held in unchanging proximity to whatever is being filmed. It's as if the camera itself is skirting the issue – the issue being, perhaps, where the narrative is headed.

Teguia's landscapes are inviting and hazardous, exotic and fraught. The cluttered backstreets and alleyways of Algiers, which enabled successful guerrilla campaigns against the French half a century ago, have in more recent decades become an unnavigable maze cohabited by solidarity, distrust and fear. Malek (Abdelkader Affak), the protagonist of Teguia's second feature *Inland* (2008), is a topographer employed by a private electric firm in Oran to survey the north-western region of Béchar, about 60km south of the Moroccan border. Tellingly, Malek's progress is stop-start, rendered so by a lack of infrastructure and the



Anticipating the Arab Spring: *Zanj Revolution*

eternal danger of land mines. Even a successful negotiation of this terrain is no guarantee of safety: our protagonist is under suspicion from local police even before he ditches his duties for a road trip with an illegal immigrant (Ines Rose Djakou) en route to Morocco.

Teguia, who was born four years after Algeria gained independence and who lives today in economically embattled Thessaloniki, is an artist profitably open to both Eastern and Western traditions – encapsulated best, perhaps, by soundtracks that juxtapose traditional Arab folk with pulsating electro and Ornette Coleman. Such inclusivity accounts for the roaming, freestyle spirit of his work, which at times recalls Hou Hsiao-Hsien or Jia Zhangke: protagonists drift toward an uncertain future from a present they barely understand, their unspoken anxieties and the history to which they pertain revealing themselves only gradually through narratives – co-scripted by Teguia's brother, Yacine – that lack an easily described premise.

In his third and most recent feature, *Zanj Revolution* (2013), the vibrant, stylised naturalism of Hou and Jia meets the showier, more didactic polemics of Godard. Conceived before the Arab Spring, *Zanj* expands Teguia's focus on everyday life in Algiers to a similarly scarred Beirut, as seen through the eyes of an Algerian journalist (Fethi Ghares) and a Palestinian student activist living in Greece (Diyana Sabri). Tellingly, however, both protagonists seem more influenced by past ideals, as they indulge in a whimsical romance and interact with one another in aphoristic clichés. Elsewhere, naive youths spray-paint now-jejune slogans about spectres haunting Europe, as if only playacting a revolution.

Nostalgia recurs: in each case, a search for history lessons and antecedents analogous to the political situation presently facing the Arab working class is in vain. The film's central search for traces of its eponymous rebellion, which took place in and around Iraq some 11 centuries ago, turns out to be a redundant fantasy – healthily so. Onward, then, to finding new solutions to old problems – solutions that match new ways of living: where notions of identity and nation are in flux, where narratives shift shape as they proceed, and where wanderers roam, alone and together, through cities in the falling night. ☺



Looking back, looking forward: Teguia's 2006 feature debut *Rome Rather Than You*



# GAME CHANGER

The Viennale's 16mm strand paid tribute to a format with a mixture of the canonical and the forgotten and sidelined

By Olaf Möller

The main thing to criticise about the 2014 Viennale's 'Revolutions in 16mm' endeavour was its size: a subject like this needs much more space than the 13 programmes it was allotted; and while it's always just to celebrate the genius of John Ford (the subject of this edition's main retrospective, created jointly by the festival and the Austrian Film Museum), it felt less urgent than this look at a technology that changed cinema and probably the world.

With more space, more feature-length works could have been shown instead of only one: Leobardo López Aretche's 1968 experiment in collective creation, *El grito*, which had to stand alone for a whole culture of dedicated political filmmaking that produced milestones like the grand cycles of activist cinema by Ogawa Shinsuke and Tsuchimoto Noriaki. The cultural scope could easily have been widened too – while the selection sported rewarding finds from places like Portugal (Tobis Portuguesa's 1963 fascist paean to a colony lost, *Honra à Índia Portuguesa*), the Netherlands (*De bedienden van de familie Sanders*, a 1937 home movie by Dutch East Indies mining entrepreneur Hendricus Johan Andries Sanders) or France (Rose Lowder's deteriorated but still eye-poppingly gorgeous 1979 double projection *Retour d'un repère*), the vast majority of films came, as so often, from the US. And that's not to mention the other nooks and crannies that could have been investigated – missionary filmmaking, to name one example, a sphere of production whose importance as a formative influence on early sub-Saharan cinemas, among other things, still needs to be discussed in more detail. While the programme as such was enjoyable, a chance was missed.

Formats smaller than the industry norm of 35mm were developed and cultivated from very early on – almost immediately after film was confirmed as more than a novelty. Among these, 16mm became the most firmly and widely established, being something like the best possible compromise between quality and affordability. The cameras were small, robust and easy to handle while the film stocks got ever faster, meaning one could work with ever less light, making it the tool of choice for everyone filming under extreme conditions – be that jungles, the antechambers of power or the bedrooms of suburbia. Considering 16mm in all its vastness (as the Viennale's formidable curatorial duo Katja Wiederspahn and Haden Guest did) means presenting a vision of the short 20th century from its many fringes – those strata where movies don't necessarily come with dates, titles or directors' names and often the only information known is how a piece came into a collector's possession. These, of course, are the most exciting moments and finds: when the presence on the screen is all there is.

The Viennale selection was split into roughly



Internationalist: *No pincha's* account of revolution exudes an air of determination and clarity



Political filmmaking: Leobardo López Aretche's 1968 experiment in collective creation, *El grito*

*16mm was everywhere for many years, creating records and memories that would otherwise have been forgotten or suppressed*

equal halves: some programmes consisted of what one might call canonical works (including monographic sets dedicated to the great Bruce Baillie, the decidedly overrated Nathaniel Dorsky and the glacially mournful Els van Riel); others were devoted to forgotten and sidelined, if not completely anonymous, films. The latter were far more exciting, partly because they felt so 'over', 'gone'; nobody would make anything like them now, certainly not with these means and therefore not with these aesthetics. Filmed sex no longer glows and shines like Betty Page in Irving Klaw's *Peppy Graceful Dance* (circa 1950s) or the unknown saucy pale redhead of *W47 Stormy* (circa 1958); revolutions don't exude the calm determination and clarity of mind and purpose that makes Tobias Engel, Gilbert Igel and René Lefort's internationalist effort *No pincha!* (1970) so moving and convincing. Cinema commanded respect.

16mm was everywhere for many years,

helping to create records, memories of times and places, manners and customs that otherwise would have been forgotten or suppressed. In that sense, perhaps the most moving piece presented in Vienna was *[Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming]* (circa 1942-45), a 'home' movie probably shot by an internee in one of the concentration camps for Japanese-Americans established after Pearl Harbor by the US government. Everybody tries to pretend that things are fine and life goes on regardless; maybe the format, being affordable but still costly, and therefore precious, solicited that kind of behaviour. On 16mm, most worlds were still carefully attended to, even if today they look somewhere between endearingly weird, as in *[Enema Medley]* (circa 1960-62), and outright disturbing, as in *Hunting Deer and...* (1953): the former shows a couple totally into enemas getting photographed again and again, the latter a bunch of drunken hunters who play ever more disgusting dick-pranks that involve deer carcasses. Yet they all are happy. Will we ever be able to behave like that with digital? Will the images with which we flood the net's neverworld mean as much? What are we doing to our lives if we conceive of our moments and hours here as quickly captured and easily disposed of? 📷



# TIPPING POINT

The transatlantic trade agreement known as TTIP could pose a threat to Europe's long-cherished support of cultural pluralism

By Holly Aylett

TTIP – the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership – is one of those nondescript acronyms only gradually creeping into public consciousness. It denotes the proposed bilateral free-trade agreement between the USA and Europe which will inevitably become a reality since it promises an increase in trade of 30 per cent at a time when both partners are desperate for growth. The UK press has flagged controversies over the absence of transparency, the power it would give to corporations to sue national governments and the European Union, and its threat to public services, especially the NHS. Its impact on film and broadcasting has hardly been mentioned, though it is potentially inimical to both.

The TTIP aims to review existing regulations and to remove trade barriers. In relation to Europe's audiovisual sector, there are several reasons why this is problematic. Historically, there has never been a level playing field with the US film industry. It's indicative that in the UK last year, American films accounted for over a third of all releases and more than 70 per cent of the box office. It is also fundamental to the European project that pluralism and understanding are promoted across the distinct languages and cultures of its 28 member states. This is enshrined both in its constitution and in the ratification of UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, an international treaty supported by more than 130 nations but which America refuses to sign.

The Audio Visual Media Services Agreement (AVMS) is Europe's principal regulatory framework for the sector. It provides a tool kit of measures to support pluralism in film and broadcasting in recognition of the market's failure to deliver. This has been reviewed to keep pace with the digital age and one of its key measures to address today's global internet challenge is Article 13, which states: "Member States must ensure that not only television broadcasters but also on-demand audiovisual media services promote European works."

Europe's rules have always been viewed as an obstacle to the interests of the US film industry but the traditional champion of Hollywood, the Moving Picture Association of America, looks small compared with the coalition of interests now mobilising. This coalition includes Google in search and aggregation; Amazon and Apple in sales and distribution; Apple and Samsung in devices; Facebook in social networks; plus internet service providers, telecommunication companies and advertisers. Among the coalition's objectives are radical reform of copyright, no enforcement of intellectual property rights on the internet, the abolition of private copying levies and less regulation for connected TV.

TTIP is of strategic importance in this struggle, and when the European trade commissioner,



Karel De Gucht, suggested that all services should be on the table for negotiation, European creator organisations, filmmakers, unions and 14 cultural ministers mobilised to insist on the 'cultural exception', a principle established by France in response to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations in 1993. Effectively, audiovisual services would be exempt from the European mandate for the agreement, a position later endorsed by the European Parliament in June 2013 with a clear majority of 381 to 191, and an explicit specification that the exception should also apply to all online services.

The vote was not binding on the Commission, however, and three days later, in an extraordinary intervention, President Barroso condemned the move as part of an anti-globalisation programme that he considered reactionary. The commissioner for culture, Androulla Vassiliou, then proposed supporting exclusion of the audiovisual sector through 'red lines' incorporated into the mandate for negotiations. This strategy allows the US to request liberalisation of these services although the commissioner retains the right to refuse. However, the consequence of a negative response would expose these services to the risk of becoming part of a trade-off. In addition, measures could be regarded individually and time frames set up to limit any existing restrictions.

For the time being the issue has been allowed to lapse. A new European Parliament has been voted in and other trade sectors are taking priority. However, the problem is not likely to go away. The value of the global video-on-demand market has been forecast to grow from \$21 billion in 2013 to \$45 billion in 2018, so access to a digital single

market in Europe is a key aim for US internet stakeholders. Audiovisual content has the supreme benefit that it is an endlessly renewable, virtually cost-free raw material. The highway for its delivery is free and there is nothing to pay however much traffic is generated, even by social network sites like *YouTube*, for example. What's more, Europe offers companies the chance to operate through subsidiaries located wherever tax regimes are most favourable. According to the *Financial Times*, Amazon UK paid no British corporation tax up until 2010, and last year Google paid a mere £8 million despite generating more than £6 billion revenues in this country in the six years to 2010.

These huge corporate profits stand in contrast to a European film production sector sustained largely by public finance whether through regional or national funding or public-service-broadcasting agencies. These business models are necessary to serve cultural as well as economic goals and, however they evolve, public investment will continue to be necessary for the foreseeable future. It has taken time for Europe to catch up with the economics of the internet but there is growing recognition that internet players should now make a fair and proportionate contribution towards local production, and that this should be paid in the country where services are delivered to put an end to the current tax shelters. However there is still no consensus. The UK government, averse even to financing the institutions necessary to sustain diversity in our own film culture, is likely to support the petitions of our transatlantic partners against the interests of Europe.

So it's worth keeping an eye on TTIP, however attenuated the process; and since the internet promises to take the place of our collective memory, it is all the more important to defend inclusiveness and to stand up for Europe's cultural values. ☺

**i** For information and updates, go to the UK Coalition for Cultural Diversity, [ukccd.org](http://ukccd.org)

*Huge American corporate profits stand in contrast to a European film sector still largely sustained by public finance*



# DISSONANCE AS DISSENT

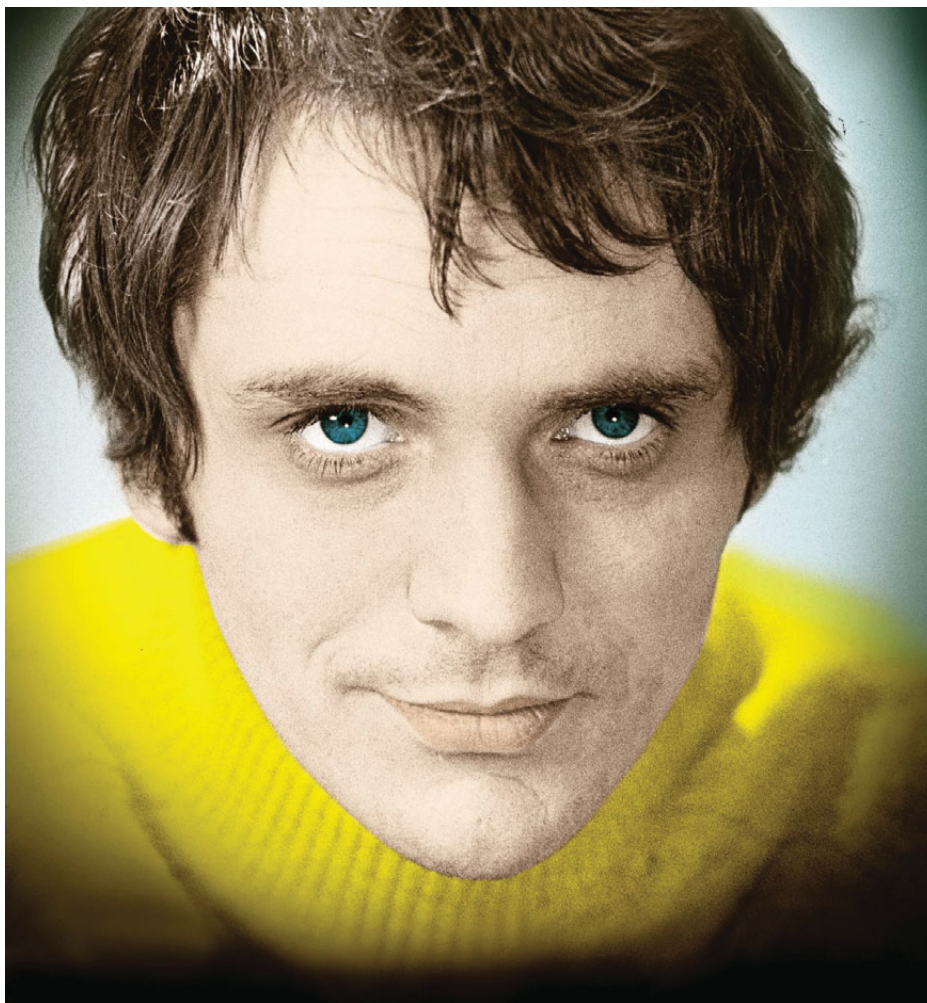
It wasn't just Sergio Leone – composer Ennio Morricone also enjoyed a varied, decade-long collaboration with Pasolini

**By Pasquale Iannone**

One of the first CDs I ever bought was a 1993 compilation of film themes by Ennio Morricone. I remember the cover being pretty uninspiring – five film reels seen through a purple and pink filter – plus there was no picture of the man himself, not even a still from one of the films. The album included memorable themes from lesser-known pictures such as *La califfa* (Alberto Bevilacqua, 1970) and *Maddalena* (Jerzy Kawalerowicz, 1971) but most came from Sergio Leone: *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968), *A Fistful of Dynamite* (1971) and *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984). Thirty years after their final work together, the Leone-Morricone collaboration is rightly seen as one of the most symbiotic of all director-composer partnerships. However, since his very first forays into film, Morricone has enjoyed long-term collaborations with a variety of filmmakers: Mauro Bolognini, Luciano Salce, Giuliano Montaldo, Aldo Lado, Roberto Faenza and Giuseppe Tornatore to name only a few. Apart from Tornatore, whose *Cinema Paradiso* (1988) features one of the composer's most popular scores, you rarely see any of the above names on a Morricone greatest-hits compilation. The same is true of another important collaborator of Morricone's, the great Italian poet and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini.

Morricone and Pasolini first worked together in 1966 when both were at important junctures in their respective careers. The composer was fresh from injecting new life into the western score with his themes for Leone's *Dollars* trilogy: out had gone lush, syrupy strings, in had come Duane Eddy-style electric guitar, the whistles of Alessandro Alessandroni and the ethereal wordless vocals of Edda Dell'Orso together with bells, whipcracks, Jew's harp and harmonica. 1966 was the year of the final and most ambitious instalment of Leone's trilogy, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, but Morricone – already conspicuously prolific – also squeezed in several other scores, including westerns such as Carlo Lizzani's *The Hills Run Red* and Sergio Sollima's *The Big Gundown* as well as comedies, political thrillers and historical dramas.

By 1966, Pasolini had three features under his belt – *Accattone* (1961), *Mamma Roma* (1962) and *The Gospel According to Matthew* (1964) – in addition to various short films including *La ricotta*, his contribution to anthology film *RoGoPaG* (1963). With each successive project, he was becoming more and more interested in formal experimentation, in irony and allegory. In terms of music for his films, he had worked with composers Carlo Rustichelli and Luis Bacalov, although neither had been called upon to provide a full score in the traditional sense. Any original themes ended up being just one element of the films' soundscapes, with Pasolini relying on an eclectic range of pre-existing music,



**Coolly enigmatic: Terence Stamp in 1968's *Theorem***

from classical to folk, jazz to blues. While his approach didn't radically change upon meeting Morricone, he certainly gave his new composer more leeway. When they met to discuss *Hawks and Sparrows* (1966), their first film together, Pasolini presented Morricone with a list of pieces he wanted to use. Morricone insisted that he preferred writing his own music and to his surprise, Pasolini gave him the green light.

Pasolini described *Hawks and Sparrows* as an 'ideo-comic fable'; it follows father and son Totò and Ninetto (Totò and Ninetto Davoli) as they make their way through the outskirts of Rome. They encounter a talking crow (voiced by poet Francesco Leonetti) whose pronouncements

*Morricone insisted that he preferred writing his own music and to his surprise, Pasolini gave him the green light*

reflect some of Pasolini's own political views in the post-war period. The director's previous three features had opened with credits in black text on an off-white background; the credits for *Hawks and Sparrows* take a different shape. They appear in white against a shot of the night sky... and are sung at the same time. A jaunty violin melody builds into a full-bodied, unmistakably



***Hawks and Sparrows* (1966)**



***The Earth Seen from the Moon* (1967)**



Morricone sound accompanying singer Domenico Modugno (of 'Volare' fame) as he makes his way through cast and crew. 'Sergio Citti helped out as a philosopher' he sings, producer Alfredo Bini 'risked his position' while Pasolini 'risked his reputation'. Many films had featured spoken titles before – Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963) – but very few had actually been sung (two years after *Hawks and Sparrows*, Otto Preminger would have Harry Nilsson sing the end credits to his 1968 counter-culture satire *Skidoo*). Another of Morricone's stand-out pieces for *Hawks and Sparrows* is 'Dance School in the Sun', a joyous theme whose shuffling drums, bells and twangy electric guitar wouldn't seem out of place on one of his spaghetti western scores.

The Pasolini-Morricone collaboration continued into *The Earth Seen from the Moon*, an episode for the 1967 anthology film *The Witches*. Totò and Ninetto are reunited and this time play ginger-haired father and son Ciancicato and Baciù Miao, who, after mourning the death of wife and mother Crisantema, decide to set off in search of a new family matriarch. Morricone's themes in this film – whether wistful or comic – are built around beautiful melodies on the mandolin.

Pasolini took his composer into different territory again with *Theorem* (1968), the tale of a mysterious young man (Terence Stamp) who seduces all the members of a bourgeois family. There's very little of the lightness of *Hawks and Sparrows* and *The Earth Seen from the Moon* here. On the whole, Morricone's themes for *Theorem* are coolly enigmatic, more dissonant, mixed in with existing pieces such as the mournful jazz trumpet of Ted Curson's 'Tears for Dolphy'. In a 2013 entry for his blog *The Blue Moment*, Richard Williams describes Morricone's work on *Theorem* as "jagged [and] post-serialist" but suggests it's "Curson's piece that carries the greatest emotional weight, its spare contours providing the perfect evocation of the discontents that accompanied Italy's post-war reconstruction".

Morricone had not been called upon for 1967's *Oedipus Rex* and his music was also absent from *Pigsty* (1969) and *Medea* (1970). He returned, albeit in a largely consultative role, for Pasolini's final four films: *The Decameron* (1971), *The Canterbury Tales* (1972), *Arabian Nights* (1974) and *Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975). For all four, Pasolini took a similar approach to his early work with Rustichelli and Bacalov and constructed a soundscape of mostly pre-existing music; only with *Arabian Nights* did he give Morricone a freer hand to compose new pieces (including the gorgeous 'Dunja's Theme'). Having insisted on composing original material since the beginning of his working relationship with Pasolini, Morricone accepted the director's wishes this time around.

Looking over the pair's near decade-long working relationship, it's clear – as Antonella Sisto points out in *Film Sound in Italy* (2014) – that "Pasolini's ideological consciousness... finds play in the stylistic dissonant experimentation of bringing together radically different musical and linguistic texts in the soundtrack... He experiments with dissonance as dissent, to voice difference against homologation and sameness." ☺

## PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

The latest Pordenone festival offered Russian comedy, a Barrymore family portrait and a splash of colour



By Geoff Brown

The Giornate del Cinema Muto in Pordenone, the planet's most renowned silent-film festival, doesn't have awards. But if it did, the gong for most amazing intertitle would have gone to the plucky Thanhouer Company for its lively and politically incorrect 1912 short *The Star of the Side Show*, whose opening title reads: "The peasants regret that their only daughter is a midget." The winner of best shot was equally clear, at least to me. It appeared in the surviving reel of Yakov Protazanov's *One Plays – The Other Pays*, a farcical comedy of 1913. The hero enters a building in silhouette. Behind him, through the door into the street, we see different strands of social activity, each occupying its own horizontal plane like the scenery in a toy theatre: pedestrians passing, cars trundling, horses trotting, the whole topped off by a train puffing along in the opposite direction. A magical cinematic digression.

And best film? This year, the festival's 33rd, presented no obvious contender, though the week threw up plenty of tasty entertainment. The Protazanov came from a strand optimistically called Russian Laughter. We weren't tumbling out of our seats all the time, but the seven selections from the prolific, chameleonic Protazanov regularly delighted with their wry humanity, visual panache, sense of the absurd and brilliant acting. Dancing before my eyes I can still see Maria Blumenthal-Tamarina's bemused peasant woman in *Don Diego and Pelageya* (1928), trapped in Soviet red tape after a minor infringement of railway regulations; and Ivan Moskvina in the Chekhov trilogy *Ranks and People* (1929), abjectly obsessed with apologising for accidentally spattering a general with food. Impossible too to forget Igor Ilyinsky, capering through three films with enough roguish mischief and childish desires to vault over Chaplin into the penumbra of Jerry Lewis.

Acting also provided the chief focus of the section devoted to the Barrymore family: John, Lionel and Ethel plus a welcome peek at the spry comedies of their uncle Sidney Drew, so funny in *Boobley's Baby* (1915). Ethel's few remaining silents provide little sense of her stage prowess and few reasons for her early film fame. Already quite stocky, with an inexpressive face, her emotions mostly seemed to lie in the movement of her heavy eyelids. Still, it was impossible to resist the crazy narrative of *The White Raven* (1917), in which she journeys from Alaskan saloon singer to an opera diva bent on revenge.

Lionel, a consummate ham in most of his talkies, looked much better. *The Copperhead* (1920), based on one of his biggest stage

*Russian comedies delighted with their wry humanity, absurdity and brilliant acting*



John Barrymore (right) in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

successes, showed an actor splendidly restrained in his depiction of internal distress. No outside tics, no grandstanding: the conflicts endured by his character, enrolled into Lincoln's secret service during the Civil War, emerged through miniature cracks in a stoic resolve and a wistful light about the eyes. By the end, his family sufferings in the name of his country brought even hardened film archivists to tears.

It was the roistering John Barrymore though who stole the show, with bravura performances in lavish productions bankrolled by companies awed by the stage prestige of the 'Great Profile' and the leading Hamlet of his day. *The Incurable Duke* of 1915 cast him for too long as a drunken punchbag before redemption arrived in the final reel, though you couldn't fault the man's exuberance. Later films, visually ornate if sometimes sluggish, put him to much more profitable use, showcasing his profile and athletic prowess while also displaying his weird, dark love of disfigurement and the grotesque. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1920) fused his two sides most rewardingly, top-hatted elegance giving way to his horrible Hyde, leering and shaggy, with gravestone teeth and hunched back. Absurd eyebrows and too much capering marred his fancy turn as poet François Villon in *The Beloved Rogue* (1927), but pleasures in *When a Man Loves* (1927) rolled on and on, from Dolores Costello's beauty and Henry Hadley's spirited Vitaphone score to John's shapely legs, exquisite in high silk stockings.

Missing from this family portrait was the sound of the Barrymores talking. But films with soundtracks of one sort or another kept popping up throughout the week, like Germany's early sound-on-disc *Tonbilder* and 1930's stirringly synchronised *Battleship Potemkin*, crackling with agit-prop fury. We were also doused in the prettiest hues in a wandering section labelled The Dawn of Technicolor, in which colour highlighted everything from Christ's crucifixion to Clara Bow's hair. At their best, the week's piano accompaniments provided extra colour of their own: Stephen Horne and his one-man band added perky fun to Mitchell and Kenyon's Edwardian entertainment scenes, while Philip C. Carli, the Barrymore strand's curator, particularly excelled at the drama of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. ☺



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# Reviews



## 73 **Dumb and Dumber To**

*As big and broad as some of the jokes may be, the smallest ones best demonstrate Jim Carrey's dexterity and finesse, whether it's a matter of messily gobbling up a hot dog or eating a banana in a funeral home and tossing the peel into an occupied casket*



62 Films of the month



68 Films



94 Home Cinema



104 Books





Twice the man he was: Jake Gyllenhaal stars as teacher Adam and his double, actor Anthony

## Enemy

Canada/Spain/France 2013

Director: Denis Villeneuve

Certificate 15 90m 27s

### Reviewed by Jason Anderson

#### Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

"Chaos is order yet undeciphered." Spoken in a conversation that is otherwise not included in Denis Villeneuve's deeply beguiling adaptation of José Saramago's novel *The Double*, the line used as *Enemy*'s epigraph summarises the challenge the film poses to its audience. That's true whether the viewers in question already delight in deciphering puzzle films such as Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) or *Inception* (2010) or come to *Enemy* hoping for a more clearly signposted mystery thriller along the lines of *Prisoners* (2013), the Canadian director's other recent teaming with star Jake Gyllenhaal. In either case, they may react to *Enemy*'s aggressive disdain for storytelling conventions and cheeky refusal to cede its secrets with the same air of befuddlement that greeted the film's premiere in Toronto in September 2013, when several moments of stunned silence followed the final spidery surprise.

First published in the original Portuguese in 2002, Saramago's novel is similarly unforthcoming about the cosmic machinations that have resulted in two entirely identical men sharing the same pocket of the space-time continuum. Instead of pondering the reasons

for this aberration or its potential impact on our commonly held but perhaps equally absurd delusions about our uniqueness as individuals, the novel's unidentified narrator busies himself with an account of the tightly wound protagonist's efforts to discover the identity and whereabouts of his double while concealing his own role in this unprecedented predicament. (The reasons behind the plague in Saramago's *Blindness* – whose 2008 film adaptation was co-produced by some of the team behind *Enemy* – were similarly obscure.) The protagonist's floundering results in a comedy of errors (and manners) whose seemingly light-hearted tone belies the existential horror at the story's core, as well as the cruelly tragic nature of its finale, which leaves him essentially imprisoned in his double's existence.

In their adaptation, Villeneuve and Spanish

screenwriter Javier Gullón retain much of Saramago's dry humour while amplifying the dread with elements of their own invention. As a result, the matter of *Enemy*'s own identity becomes nearly as slippery as that of its two identical protagonists. After an alluring intro set in a sex club that seems rather less classy than the iconic example in *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), the film settles into a more wryly satirical mode, with teacher Adam's classroom talk of Marx and history's repetitions juxtaposed with glimpses of his personal hamster wheel of glum streetcar commutes and joyless couplings with girlfriend Mary. When he comes across the existence of his double, actor Anthony, his actions push the proceedings into the shape of a mystery story, albeit one with a rather hapless sleuth who is soon hopelessly trapped inside



Double take: Jake Gyllenhaal



Two's company: Jake Gyllenhaal





*It's all indicative of a filmmaker who's having a grand old time, but it's hard to begrudge Villeneuve his indulgences when they yield this much pleasure*

Gyllenhaal has relatively few encounters with himself, and Villeneuve is largely uninterested in wowing viewers with the sight of two Jakes sharing the frame. In fact, he goes so far as to skip the opportunity for a fight scene – Saramago's actor is far rougher than the timid teacher, immobilising him with an armlock during their confrontation over his nefarious plans.

And whereas Eisenberg's pair of rivals in *The Double* are locked in the ego-versus-id dynamic typical of twin tales, the personalities of Adam and Anthony do not boast so many easily discernible differences. Hesitant and nervous in his manner, Adam may display little of the actorly swagger we see in Anthony, but the two men share a certain aloofness and a cool determination to see their decisions through, even when their later ones prompt a growing degree of identity confusion. This is most startling when Adam visits his mother, played with a marvellous hauteur by Isabella Rossellini. When she makes a disdainful reference to his acting career, both Adam (if it is actually Adam) and the viewer rightly wonder who he's supposed to be. There's the possibility that she's been Anthony's mother all along.

Appropriating the self-dividing protagonists of *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Dr.* (2003) would hardly count as the only move that *Enemy* borrows from David Lynch's playbook. His influence is just as palpable in the oddly languorous pacing of many scenes and the

hard, washed-out look of Toronto, whose curvy cylinders of glass and concrete reaching up into smoggy skies of yellow could almost pass for Lynch's Los Angeles. The Silencio-like club and the arachnid motif are Villeneuve and Gullón's most conspicuous additions to Saramago's story. Whatever the spider's symbolic significance may be (perhaps we're meant to think of a Jorogumo, a creature that transforms into a human seductress in Japanese folklore), the motif prompts some of *Enemy*'s most striking images. The shiny face of a spider-woman glimpsed in one of Adam's dreams is cleverly evoked by the sheen of the motorcycle helmet that Anthony wears to conceal himself while stalking Mary. Likewise, the web-like appearance of a cracked window in a car wreck forecasts Adam's final surprise.

All this is highly indicative of a filmmaker who's having a grand old time. That might come sometimes at the viewer's expense, but it's hard to begrudge Villeneuve his indulgences when they yield this much pleasure. The director seems consistently delighted at this opportunity to shift away from the high-minded seriousness of *Prisoners* and *Incendies* (2010) and demonstrate the same flair for the absurd he showed in *Maelstrom* (2000), a similarly audacious, arresting and confounding drama that may not have had any spiders but did have a dead fish for a narrator.

Playing a character who's a far cry from his saucer-eyed sociopath in Tony Gilroy's *Nightcrawler* (2014), Gyllenhaal faces the tricky task of conveying the subtle differences of two men whose identities are thrown into flux. The result is his most nuanced performance since playing another sleuth caught out of his depth in *Zodiac* (2007). Like David Fincher's masterful descent into the irrational and the unknowable, *Enemy* offers no tidy solutions, only a very sticky web and a hungry creature that's ready to swallow you whole. ☹

"the plot of a detective novel with no known criminal", as Saramago's narrator puts it.

Like the source material, Villeneuve's film contains more than a few traces of sex farce, too. After all, our store of ribald tales would surely be drastically reduced if not for the abundance of incidents involving mistaken, concealed or switched identities. Anthony – whose history of philandering is suggested in a fraught exchange with his wife Helen – certainly recognises the potential advantages of his situation. Following Mary on to a streetcar, he sizes her up with the air of a predator who is absolutely certain of his hunting prowess. He understands that he already possesses the most perfect of all disguises. (In one of the film's smarter reversals, it is Helen who proves to be the bolder lover, when she plays along with Adam's far from persuasive impersonation of her husband.)

*Enemy* displays a similarly playful attitude towards its place in a lineage of films with twin or otherwise identical characters, a tradition that seems especially rich in Toronto (where this film is set) thanks to Jeremy Irons's double act in David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (1988) and Tatiana Maslany's astounding performance as a multiplicity of clones in the BBC America hit *Orphan Black* (2013-). It was thanks to another piece of synchronicity that *Enemy* arrived on the festival circuit at the same time as Richard Ayoade's adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Double*, with Jesse Eisenberg facing off against himself. But compared with the performers in these examples,

#### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Niv Fichman  
Miguel A. Faura  
**Written by**  
Javier Gullón  
Based on the novel  
*The Double* [O  
*Homem Duplicado*]  
by José Saramago  
**Photographed by**  
Nicolas Bolduc  
**Edited by**  
Matthew Hannam  
**Designed by**  
Patrice Vermette  
**Original Music**  
Danny Bens  
Saunders Jurriaans  
**Production**  
Sound Mixer  
Herwig Gayer  
**Costumes**  
Renée April

©Rhombus Media  
(Enemy) Inc./  
Roxbury Pictures  
S.L./9232-2437  
Québec Inc./  
Mecanismo Films,  
S.L./Roxbury  
Enemy S.L.  
**Production**  
Companies  
Pathé +  
Entertainment One  
present a Rhombus  
Media + Roxbury  
Pictures production  
with micro\_scope +  
Mecanismo Films  
Produced with the  
participation of

Telefilm Canada,  
Instituto de la  
Cinematografía  
y de las Artes  
Audiovisuales, Corus  
Entertainment,  
Televisión Española,  
Ontario Media  
Development  
Corporation, Société  
de développement  
des entreprises  
culturelles – Québec  
Produced with the  
participation of  
Telefilm Canada,  
Gobierno de  
España, Televisión  
Española, Movie  
Central, The Movie  
Network, Ontario  
Media Development  
Corporation  
Produced with  
the assistance of  
Canadian Film or  
Video Production  
Tax Credit, Québec  
Film and Television  
Tax Credit  
**Executive Producers**  
François Ivernel  
Cameron McCracken  
Mark Slone  
Victor Loewy

**Cast**  
Jake Gyllenhaal  
Adam/Anthony Clair  
Mélanie Laurent  
Mary  
Sarah Gadon

Helen  
Isabella Rossellini  
mother  
Josh Peace  
teacher at school  
Tim Post  
Anthony's concierge  
Kedar Brown  
security guard  
Darryl Dinn  
video store clerk  
Misha Highstead  
Megan Mane

Dolby Digital  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

Distributor  
Pathé Productions  
Ltd

Toronto, the present. A group of men in a club watch a live sex show that culminates in the sight of a woman about to crush a spider. One of the men appears to be Adam, a history professor who displays little passion for his work or his girlfriend Mary. On the recommendation of a colleague, Adam rents a DVD in which he sees an actor who is his exact doppelganger. After intercepting a letter at his double's talent agency, Adam discovers the actor's name, Anthony Clair, and his address.

A call to Anthony's apartment is answered by his pregnant wife Helen, who recognises Adam's voice as her husband's. When Adam calls later and reaches Anthony, the latter reacts with hostility. Tracking Adam to his workplace, Helen is dumbstruck by his resemblance to her husband but conceals her identity during their encounter. Unbeknown to her, Anthony and Adam arrange to meet at a hotel, where they too are amazed by the resemblance. Disturbed, Adam flees but Anthony begins his own surveillance of Adam and Mary. He confronts Adam and demands that the two trade identities so that he can seduce Mary. Adam acquiesces and dejectedly goes to Anthony's home wearing the other's clothes. Though seemingly aware of the ruse, Helen comforts Adam and the two make love. By contrast, the encounter between Mary and Anthony ends angrily when she sees the mark left by his wedding ring and becomes suspicious. They fight in Anthony's car, causing a fatal accident in which both die.

The next morning, in Anthony's apartment, Adam gets dressed while Helen showers. Opening the envelope that originally alerted him to Anthony's identity, Adam finds a key, presumably to the club glimpsed in the opening scene. Returning to the bedroom to speak to Helen, he finds a giant spider in her place.



## The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1

USA 2014

Director: Francis Lawrence

Certificate 12A 122m 41s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

In *Mockingjay Part 1*, Suzanne Collins's dystopian trilogy (or film tetralogy) shifts from the reality-TV-show Hunger Games to war games in earnest. Bombings, battles and military camouflage replace the gaudy costumes and equally gaudy CGI effects that shaped Katniss Everdeen's journey in the first two films. Displaced from her home district after its total destruction, Katniss and her fellow survivors are living in District 13, an underground military base thought to have been destroyed but instead turned into a 40-storey concrete bunker under the steely leadership (and steel-grey hair) of Alma Coin.

Julianne Moore makes Coin this instalment's dominant character. Collins's Coin seems to have inspired a trend for presidential bad mothers in recent young adult dystopian adaptations, such as the Chief Elder (Meryl Streep) in *The Giver* and Jeanine (Kate Winslet) in the *Divergent* franchise. Wisely, the film decides to play her differently, as more competent and more caring, adding a backstory, more sympathetic interactions with Katniss and – most importantly – scenes that cut away from Katniss's point of view to show Coin and her team in the command centre. Screenwriters Peter Craig and Danny Strong have also smartly reordered the book's sequence of events, shifting the interrelationship between the 'propo' videos in which Katniss appears as the rebels' 'Mockingjay' figurehead and the revolutionary acts these videos incite. In this way, motivation and forward momentum belong to Coin and her opposite number in the Capitol, the dictator President Snow, who also gets his own POV scenes. What Coin's spin doctor Plutarch describes as "moves and countermoves" structure a dynamic story.

Between move and countermove, however, there are few moments of humour, barring Buttercup the bad-tempered cat. Collins created a cinematic nightmare with District 13: enclosed concrete spaces, no natural light, drab military-issue clothing. As Coin's deadpan top soldier Boggs, Mahershala Ali does well to bring this environment and its community to life, but his screen time is curtailed, and it then falls to the Capitol defectors to add light to the shade: Woody Harrelson uses Haymitch's unpredictability and anarchy to good effect, and Elizabeth Banks does the same with Effie's narcissism and trouser spirit. These two generate both laughs and warmth as rare characters who get to deliver lines that are other than expository. Together with new characters Cressida and Messalla, documentary deserters from the Capitol, they ironically turn filming propos in the war zone into light relief from the grinding machinations below ground in 13. Perhaps the most haunting moment in the film starts on a propo trip to District 12, where Katniss sings a folk song, 'The Hanging Tree', to the mockingjays. The song acts as a sound bridge over the team's return to District 13 and into the sabotage of District 5, which begins with the saboteurs picking up the song from its broadcast.

This is one of the few truly effective uses of screens in the film: the connection between District 13 and the rest of Panem – and between

Katniss as protagonist and the rising action of the revolution – is entirely reliant on these broadcasts in and out. The reframing of the dramatic footage of Katniss's excursions for smaller, poor-quality screens often gives the film's most dramatic moments a televisual feel. Characters on both sides spend a lot of time standing around watching screens; while this may be a smart observation about contemporary politics and warfare, it's unspectacular. It's not aided, either, by the direct replication of Collins's functional dialogue.

Yet when director Francis Lawrence takes chances by moving away from the book, the film sparkles. In the novel, the raid on the Capitol is outside Katniss's POV – but it's a set piece too good to pass up. Lawrence takes to heart the advice given earlier by Philip Seymour Hoffman's Plutarch Heavensbee – "There's explaining, and there's showing" – and gives us a tense hovercraft flight and night-vision raid, cutting between spectacular diegetic coverage and the grainy CCTV screens in Coin's command centre. Jeffrey Wright's Q-like inventor Beetee commissions a propo to generate multichannel noise as cover for the raid, and Katniss watches as fellow games victor Finnick confesses his years as a sex worker in President Snow's employ and spills the secrets he collected from his high-profile clients. Confessional speech (and gossip) as broadcast news acts as a cover for the off-air raid in an apposite comment on American media; meanwhile the command centre visually echoes 'The Situation Room', Pete Souza's 2011 photograph of President Obama and his team watching the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad.

The raid conflates *Zero Dark Thirty*'s story of bin Laden's killing, the rescue of US soldier Jessica Lynch in Iraq and – with the discovery that Katniss's friend and co-victor Peeta has been brainwashed to kill her – the capture and release of Bowe Bergdahl in Afghanistan (the subject of Kathryn Bigelow and Mark Boal's current project). It's a sign of both the intensity of Collins's science-fictional world and of its ambiguous politics that this sequence resonates with all three contradictory stories from the US's illegal invasions.

Collins has said that the book stems partly from her father's experiences in Vietnam, which made him a passionate pacifist. Yet Districts 11 (sharecropping) and 12 (mining) appear to be parallel to Georgia (where the films are shot, in part) and Appalachia, and it can be argued that the novels represent a controversial vision of class solidarity across racial lines, with some critics arguing it's a dangerous post-racial fantasy that, in the Civil War, equally oppressed white and black southerners rose up together against the decadent, capitalist north. In 2014, the raised Mockingjay salute and protest marches are inevitably suggestive of scenes from Ferguson, Missouri – which saw riots follow the police shooting of black teenager Michael Brown last summer – as well as Ava DuVernay's forthcoming civil-rights drama *Selma*. A nagging unease thus persists about the trilogy's view of race and revolution.

The diverse casting, however, is one of the films' standout strengths compared with the vast swathe of contemporary American genre cinema: as well as Ali as Boggs and Wright as Beetee, *Mockingjay Part 1* features strong performances from Evan Ross as Messalla and Sarita Choudhary as Snow's speechwriter Egeria, while Patina Miller has a scene-stealing turn as District 8's Commander Paylor, her look and attitude



Fight club: Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen

*Battles and military camouflage replace the gaudy costumes and equally gaudy CGI effects that shaped Katniss Everdeen's journey in the first two films*




Donald Sutherland as President Snow





echoing Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983). It's a fair question whether the representation of the masses balances out the predominance of white A-list leads, and particularly the casting of a white performer as Katniss, the book's dark-skinned figurehead of the uprising. Katniss's song 'The Hanging Tree' inspires mixed-race groups of rebels to sabotage the Capitol's white-armoured Peacekeepers, yet the song itself sounds distinctly Scots-Irish Appalachian.

Jennifer Lawrence has deservedly won plaudits for her raw portrayal of Katniss, but in this third instalment, bar her stunning performance of the song, her physical and emotional expressiveness is stymied by the narrative. Too often she is trapped and stilled, not only by the Soviet-style regime of District 13 but also by a plot that makes her a traumatised figurehead and observer, sitting silently in meetings or waiting for Peeta's return, without the counterbalance of the book's first-person narration to dramatise her inner turmoil.

In its war games and their officers, *Mockingjay Part 1* – unlike *Catching Fire* (2013) – definitively catches fire. But where Beate's broadcast to the Capitol is noise disguising the action of the raid, the film's driving pace and showy set pieces threaten to drown out the centre of the story. And the story stands or falls with its central character. The mockingjay, stuck echoing the orders of the officer class, needs freedom to sing. 

## Credits and Synopsis

### Producers

Nina Jacobson  
Jon Kilik

### Screenplay

Peter Craig  
Danny Strong

### Adaptation

Suzanne Collins

Based upon her novel *Mockingjay*

### Director of Photography

Jo Willems

### Editor

Alan Edward Bell  
Mark Yoshikawa

### Production Designer

### Philip Messina

### Music

James Newton  
Howard

### Supervising

Sound Editors/

### Re-recording Mixers

Skip Lievsay  
Jeremy Peirson

### Costume Designers

Kurt and Bart

### Visual Effects

MPC  
The Embassy

Visual Effects Inc.  
Cantina Creative

Scanline VFX

### Pixomondo

Rising Sun Pictures

Iola | VFX

Whiskytree Inc

### Stunt Co-ordinator

Sam Hargrave

© Lions Gate Films Inc.

### Production Companies

Lionsgate presents

a Color Force/

Lionsgate production

### Executive Producers

Suzanne Collins  
Jan Foster

Joe Drake

### Allison Shearmuir

### Cast

**Jennifer Lawrence**

Katniss Everdeen

**Josh Hutcherson**

Peeta Mellark

**Liam Hemsworth**

Gale Hawthorne

**Woody Harrelson**

Haymitch Abernathy

**Elizabeth Banks**

Effie Trinket

**Julianne Moore**

President Alma Coin

**Philip Seymour**

### Hoffman

Plutarch Heavensbee

**Jeffrey Wright**

Beetee

**Sam Claflin**

Finnick Odair

**Jena Malone**

Johanna Mason

**Stanley Tucci**

Caesar Flickerman

**Donald Sutherland**

President Snow

**Mahershala Ali**

Boggs

**Natalie Dormer**

Cressida

**Evan Ross**

### Messalla

**Sarita Choudhury**

Egeria

**Patina Miller**

Commander Paylor

### Dolby Atmos/

Datasat

**In Colour**

Prints by

Fotokem

[2.35:1]

### Distributor

Lionsgate UK

Katniss Everdeen is in District 13, the underground military area of Panem, recovering from the Quarter Quell games that ended when she shot an arrow through an overhead forcefield. Her actions have resulted in violent reprisals from President Snow in the Capitol, prompting District 13's leader Alma Coin to ask Katniss to become a figurehead for the revolution, the 'Mockingjay'.

She is supported by her rebel games team – Gamemaker Plutarch, tech genius Beetee, mentor Haymitch, disdainful Effie and fellow games victor Finnick, as well as her mother and sister and old friend Gale. They witness the Capitol's bombing of District 8 and her home district, 12.

Video footage directed by Cressida and Messalla, rebels from the Capitol, sparks civil disobedience across

Panem. When rebels in District 5 blow the hydroelectric dam, Beetee beams footage of Katniss into the Capitol itself, disrupting a broadcast in which Katniss's captured co-tribune Peeta argues for a ceasefire.

Peeta warns Katniss of an attack, leading to lockdown in District 13 – and prompting Coin to strike back, rescuing Peeta and two other imprisoned victors. To distract from the raid, Finnick broadcasts secrets he collected while being pimped by Snow, and Katniss talks directly to the president.

Snow's warning to Katniss that her loved ones are her weakness is borne out when Peeta tries to strangle her: drugged and tortured, Peeta has been conditioned to fear her. She watches him writhe in agony as he undergoes deprogramming. Coin, buoyed by the success of the raid, broadcasts a call for full-blown revolution.





Galaxy quest: Anne Hathaway as Amelia and Matthew McConaughey as Cooper in Christopher Nolan's epic space adventure

## Interstellar

USA/United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Christopher Nolan  
Certificate 12A 168m 49s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Christopher Nolan is, by almost any standard, a monumental figure in the landscape of contemporary cinema. He has enjoyed a near-unblemished track record of massive box-office success for going on a decade. He has remained committed to shooting on film in the face of an almost industrywide shift towards digital, and has used his pull to make sure that theatres equipped to project his latest, *Interstellar*, in either 35mm or 70mm will get first dibs on playing it for a paying audience. As the blockbuster has become increasingly formulaic, made-by-committee and dependent on tie-in world-building – see, for example, Marvel Studios' recent unveiling of its release strategy for the next several lifetimes – Nolan, after his three Batman films, has evinced an interest in making big movies that are self-contained, freestanding edifices, bearing a personal imprint. All of this is, on paper at least, to the good. So it is without great relish that I must report that *Interstellar*, like *Inception* (2010) before it, feels like being tangled up in a pile of infinitely unfolding some-assembly-required

instructions in the watching, full of dialogue resembling the recital of a how-to manual.

As in *Inception*, there is a lot of explaining-what-is-going-on-right-now-at-great-length in *Interstellar* – though happily this time most of it comes from Matthew McConaughey and Anne Hathaway at their most appealing, rather than from Leo DiCaprio in the dregs of his bottomless-anguish phase. The movie gives McConaughey at least one knockout, Oscar-reel scene, though the premise behind it is so intrinsically moving that it would be almost impossible to fudge. Leading a desperate last-ditch mission to find a new habitable home for the residents of a blighted Earth, McConaughey's space pilot Cooper (as in Gary) and Hathaway's scientist Amelia (as in Earhart) touch down on a candidate planet orbiting a black hole; for every hour they spend on its surface, seven years will pass on Earth. Returning in their landing craft a few hours later to dock with the orbiting space station – which looks like a lazily revolving sprinkler spigot – Cooper catches up on his video messages from Tom and Murph, the son and daughter left behind as children and now grown to become his near-contemporaries. (They've aged into Casey Affleck and Jessica Chastain respectively.)

McConaughey's emotional dam-burst here is ragged and startling, and for this moment at least, Nolan realises his movie's evident

ambition – to create a work at once intimate and cosmic in scope, in which the fate of humanity depends on what happens in one little girl's bedroom, and the survival of the family of man hinges on one man's family. When Cooper first decides to take on the mission that may very well separate him from his children for ever, the roar of his Dodge Ram pickup blasting down the gravel driveway matches the sound of his shuttle taking off – leaving Earth is almost an afterthought after leaving home.

In *Interstellar*, the business of saving humanity is very much a local matter. Cooper and Murph's pained parting begins when inexplicable forces lead ex-astronaut-next-door Cooper to the headquarters of NASA, seemingly just a couple of counties over. Until Cooper takes leave of his home planet, presenting the opportunity for an orbital perspective, the movie shows us nothing more than a John Cougar Mellencamp-esque version of the American heartland, *Smallville* in extremis. This is all that remains after a mass depopulation in the wake of a crop blight that has affected every staple but corn and has forced America (and presumably whatever is left of the rest of the planet) to dedicate itself completely to agrarian pursuits. The mood is very much faded-stars-and-stripes downbeat in the key of Merle Haggard's 'Are the Good Times Really Over', with McConaughey kicking back on his porch



and musing, "It's like we've forgotten who we are: explorers, pioneers, not caretakers." Even the school textbooks discourage big dreams now, teaching that the moon landing was faked to bankrupt the Soviet Union. It's a cheap, bald-faced appeal to a battered sense of American pride which belies the movie's cerebral pretensions, and when the head of the exiled NASA, one Professor Brand (Michael Caine) – Amelia's father, as it happens – tells Cooper, "I can't tell you any more unless you agree to pilot this craft," it feels closer to Michael Bay's *Armageddon* than to a certain movie in the Kubrick catalogue.

*Interstellar* can do awesome, as you'd hope a film that commanded the resources of two major studios (Paramount and Warner Bros) should. The movie, which I saw as it was meant to be seen, on a three-storey IMAX screen, is striated with images conveying sheer vastness: Cooper's family farm a lone beacon in the country night; devastating dust storms and tidal waves approaching on the horizon; Cooper's craft dwarfed by the rings of Saturn. There is a marvellous set piece that ranks as Nolan's single greatest accomplishment in his master-engineer mode, beginning with a flailing fight for the future of humanity on the stark surface of a distant, dead planet – something like the end of Von Stroheim's *Greed* in spacesuits – and ending with Cooper docking his landing craft with a spinning-out-of-control station.

As spectacle, *Interstellar* is a fitful success – but Nolan isn't content with ooohs and aahs. His passion for involuted chronology dates back to 1998's *Memento*, written with his long-time co-screenwriter brother Jonathan, and *Interstellar* is similarly contorted around various temporal shifts. Early on we're shown talking-head interviews with elderly survivors of the

*A flailing fight for the future of humanity on the stark surface of a distant, dead planet is something like the end of Von Stroheim's 'Greed' in spacesuits*



Keep the flame alight: Murph (Jessica Chastain)

Earth's death, speaking of the present in which the film opens as a distant past and thus giving the movie a long-view perspective, actively nullifying any suspense as to the question of humanity's chances of enduring. Later, when Cooper stumbles on a line of communication that allows him to deliver messages to Earth across time and space, Nolan comes very near to the territory of *Inception*, using state-of-the-art special effects – here a *mise en abyme* pseudo-Borgesian library – to create visual corollaries to the birth of inspiration. The climax, I fear, requires Chastain to hoot "Eureka!"

What can you say about an artist who, when seeking to celebrate revelatory vision and the indomitability of the human spirit, goes about doing so almost entirely through cliché? Caine's hoary recital of Dylan Thomas's 'Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night' provides the movie with a sort of refrain – "Oh Captain! My Captain!" was, of course, already taken. The comic relief is courtesy of Cooper's robot companion TARS, whose wisecracking is dictated by his humour setting. This is seemingly meant as a play on the formulaic nature of screenwriting – the executive request to 'dial up the comedy a little' – but the self-aware acknowledgement doesn't make it any less formulaic, nor does it make the no-fun Nolans any more adept at lightening the mood.

Where sceptics such as myself will cry cliché, Nolan's partisans will undoubtedly see an artist working in the powerful, primal medium of archetypes. But archetypes need a hard and clear

glint, so as to be comprehensible at a glance, and *Interstellar* proves true to Nolan's habit of swaddling his movies in layers of exposition and explanation, here effectively dulling the emotional effects of his last act. Consequently, when Cooper, still a fit fortysomething, is reunited with his daughter, now a very old and dying woman, the scene is considerably less moving than that between Chris Evans's Captain and Hayley Atwell's Peggy Carter, his WWII sweetheart, in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* – the very cookie-cutter entertainment that Nolan is supposedly saving us from. In a hopeless multiplex present, Nolan has been tasked with the impossible job of leading the way to a better future, providing the legendary 'blockbuster with brains'. With the year's umpteenth paean to the nigh-supernatural power of fatherhood, all he's provided is another harvest of corn. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Emma Thomas  
Christopher Nolan  
Lynda Obst  
**Written by**  
Jonathan Nolan  
Christopher Nolan  
**Director of Photography**  
Hoyte Van Hoytema  
**Edited by**  
Lee Smith  
**Production Designer**  
Nathan Crowley  
**Music**  
Hans Zimmer  
**Sound Designer/Supervising Sound Editor**  
Richard King  
**Costumes Designed by**  
Mary Zophres  
**Visual Effects Supervisor**  
Paul Franklin  
**Visual Effects**  
Double Negative Ltd  
New Deal Studios, Inc.  
©Warner Bros.

Entertainment Inc. and Paramount Pictures Corporation  
**Production Companies**  
A Warner Bros. Pictures and Paramount presentation in association with Legendary Pictures  
A Syncope/Lynda Obst Productions production  
A film by Christopher Nolan  
**Executive Producers**  
Jordan Goldberg  
Jake Myers  
Kip Thorne  
Thomas Tull

**Cast**  
Matthew McConaughey  
Cooper  
Anne Hathaway  
Amelia Brand  
Jessica Chastain  
Murph  
Ellen Burstyn

Murph when older  
John Lithgow  
Donald Michael Caine  
Professor Brand  
Casey Affleck  
Tom Wes Bentley  
Doyle Bill Irwin  
voice of TARS  
Mackenzie Foy  
Murph at 10 years old  
Topher Grace  
Getty David Gyasi  
Romilly  
**Dolby Digital/ Datasat Colour and Prints by**  
Fotokem [2.35:1]  
**Distributor**  
Warner Bros. Pictures  
International (UK)  
**IMAX 70mm prints**  
167m 31s

Middle America, two generations hence. Famine has depopulated earth. Cooper, a former NASA pilot turned farmer, is raising his two children, daughter Murph and son Tom. Murph insists that there's a ghost in her room who's trying to send her messages, and one of these messages provides coordinates to a nearby location. Cooper and Murph follow it and discover the headquarters of the gone-underground NASA. Their scientists, led by Professor Brand, have discovered a wormhole that leads to a distant solar system containing potentially habitable planets. NASA needs Cooper to pilot their last remaining craft on a dangerous mission, taking a crew including Brand's daughter Amelia to follow up previous expeditions and determine which of those planets offers the best option for a new home. They explore a water planet, on which crew member Doyle is killed, then an icy planet, where they encounter Dr Mann, part of the previous expedition. Mann has been faking positive data about 'his' designated planet to lure in help from the outside. In Cooper's absence, 30 years pass on Earth while he ages only a few hours. Murph, now an eminent scientist, works to crack a formula that will prepare a vessel capable of saving the people of Earth for space travel. Cooper slips through a black hole into the fifth dimension, where he finds himself able to communicate with Murph in both the present and past – he's the ghost in her bedroom. Through this medium, he helps her to solve her formula. Some years hence, Cooper is found alive, floating in space by a craft containing the immigrant population of earth, now headed towards their new home in the stars. He is reunited with Murph, now an old woman.



Grave new world: exploring one of the planets where humanity might live after leaving Earth



## Algorithms

India/United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Ian McDonald  
Certificate U 100m 18s



Board meeting: *Algorithms*

### Reviewed by Roger Clarke

An opening shot, completely out of focus, accompanied by the twang of an Indian stringed instrument, coalesces into a hand resting on a chess piece. It is a crushing hand, a dead-weight hand. The chess piece is a humble pawn. It's an almost gothic image. Then we see the hands of the opponent – they are more animated, more slender. We notice the chessboard is different, with pegs and holes, and the fingertips of the chess players seek out every piece and every hole in a constant buzz of tactile efficiency. These are the hands of young blind chess players in India, and this is the journey of three of them hoping for international fame.

"Chess is a mind game," says Charudatta Jadhav, a blind former chess champion on a mission to find and foster the first blind Grandmaster. "Chess is the only game where a blind player can play at par with the sighted," he says. He's not wrong. From the outset we see that the young players can memorise whole games in their

head, and have perfect recall and visualisation, with a kind of fluency that seems a natural part of their condition, of their coping mechanism. If anything, perhaps they have an advantage. This is never claimed outright, but by the end of the film the viewer may feel that Jadhav truly believes it. Jadhav, by the way, seems an admirable man – inspirational at the right moments, but very tender to his charges, especially to the youngest, homesick during his travels to competitions in Stockholm, Belgrade and Rhodes.

One of the three boys is 12-year-old Sai Krishna, who seems like any other bright 12-year-old and doesn't even like people knowing that he's blind. He's naturally gifted but unable to formulate advanced tactics, and his cockiness proves his undoing. He begins as the star of the film but ends up being left behind. Anant's story has elements familiar to all those born into poverty; his parents are unable to comprehend the point of his chess-playing, despite a visit from an official, and his game slowly deteriorates. The real star is the eccentric Darpan, middle-class, blinded and horribly damaged by a medical mishap; he is all good-humoured intensity with more than a dusting of camp, unfazed by his extraordinarily pushy and guilty mother.

The film looks gorgeous. It's black-and-white, full of close-ups and the occasional zoom, and the handheld camerawork feels intimate without ever being intrusive. The music alternates between Indian and acoustic and electric guitar. The sound of birds nesting in a Mumbai chess hall is also allowed to integrate into the soundscape.

This is the world of Satyajit Ray and it's impossible to talk about *Algorithms* without mentioning his 1977 Mughal meta-drama *The Chess Players*, a great meditation on the imperial chess games of the East India Company and Wajid Ali Shah in the year before the Indian Mutiny. It couldn't be more different in its themes of geopolitics, grantees and shapers of history. *Algorithms* (a title that remains slightly puzzling) is really the world of Apu, and in this sense, director Ian McDonald has made a film about chess that is more Ray than Ray's film about chess. But it shares with the 1977 film a sense of greater worlds being formed, of tactics, of stabilising a problem through careful thought, of advancement, and chess finally as a metaphor for conflict and resolution. **S**

## The Best of Me

USA 2014  
Director: Michael Hoffman  
Certificate 12A 117m 40s

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

The ninth adaptation of a novel by *The Notebook* author Nicholas Sparks is – no surprises – a gluey lovers' tragedy, reuniting stricken sweethearts after 20 years apart. James Marsden's Dawson is a typical Sparks creation: a placid, strapping, green-fingered, working-class labourer and bookworm (as *The Notebook*'s Noah read Whitman, so Dawson pores over Hawking). He and his 'Juliet' Amanda (Michelle Monaghan), who's now married to another man, recommence their romance in the same locations they started it as teenagers, but it's a rhyming that's more monotonous than poignant. The film builds by flashbacks to a first heartrending reveal (the reason for the ruin of their earlier relationship), before the whole melting pot of misery boils over in the present, serving up more than a lifetime's worth of suffering.

As is always the danger with a story spanning decades, the inner lives of its players genuflect to plot. Dawson's defining characteristic is a written-in-the-stars acceptance, while the greater complications for the adult Amanda come from the fact that she has a family. After much arduous to-ing and fro-ing between eras, *The Best of Me* rests on our expectations of the ill-starred love story – or, more particularly, of a Sparks film, which is fast becoming a genre of its own. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Denise Di Novi Alison Greenspan Nicholas Sparks Ryan Kavanaugh Russ Kavanaugh Theresa Park <b>Written by</b> Will Fetters J. Mills Goodloe Based upon the novel by Nicholas Sparks <b>Director of Photography</b> Oliver Stapleton <b>Editor</b> Matt Chesse <b>Production Designer</b> Patrizia von Brandenstein <b>Music</b> Aaron Zigman <b>Sound Mixer</b> Michael B. Koff <b>Costume Designer</b> Ruth E. Carter	<b>Companies</b> Relativity Media presents a Relativity Media, Di Novi Pictures, Nicholas Sparks production A Michael Hoffman film <b>Executive Producers</b> Tucker Tooley Robbie Brenner Ron Burkle Jason Colbeck Jared D. Underwood Andrew C. Robinson	<b>Jon Tenney</b> Harvey Collier <b>Gerald McRaney</b> Tuck  <b>Dolby Digital In Colour</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> E1 Films
<b>Produced by</b> Geetha J. <b>Screenplay</b> Geetha J. Ian McDonald <b>Edited by</b> Ian McDonald <b>Editors</b> Ajithkumar B. Ian McDonald <b>Original Music</b>	<b>Prasanna Sound</b> Harikumar N.  <b>@AkamPuram Production Companies</b> AkamPuram presents with the participation of Interventions &	<b>Gamakam a film by Ian McDonald</b> An AkamPuram production  <b>In Black and White</b> [1.78:1] <b>Part-subtitled</b>  <b>Distributor</b> OurScreen
<b>Cast</b> <b>Michelle Monaghan</b> Amanda Collier <b>James Marsden</b> Dawson Cole <b>Luke Bracey</b> young Dawson Cole <b>Liana Liberato</b> young Amanda Collier <b>Caroline Goodall</b> Evelyn Collier <b>Sebastian Arcelus</b> Frank		

New Orleans, present day. Oil worker Dawson and married mother Amanda are former sweethearts who rekindle their romance. Flashbacks trace their teenage relationship, which was cut short by Dawson's imprisonment for the accidental manslaughter of his cousin Bobby during a brawl with Dawson's abusive father.

Though they are still in love, the pair go their separate ways. Amanda's son is involved in a car accident; he survives thanks to a heart transplant from an anonymous donor. Shortly afterwards, Amanda learns that Dawson was shot dead by his father, who served a longer sentence for Bobby's killing.

One year on, Amanda discovers that Dawson was the heart donor.

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Geetha J. <b>Screenplay</b> Geetha J. Ian McDonald <b>Edited by</b> Ian McDonald <b>Editors</b> Ajithkumar B. Ian McDonald <b>Original Music</b>	<b>Prasanna Sound</b> Harikumar N.  <b>@AkamPuram Production Companies</b> AkamPuram presents with the participation of Interventions &	<b>Gamakam a film by Ian McDonald</b> An AkamPuram production  <b>In Black and White</b> [1.78:1] <b>Part-subtitled</b>  <b>Distributor</b> OurScreen
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A documentary following blind former chess champion Charudatta Jadhav as he holds a competition in Mumbai in 2009 to find a new generation of junior unsighted chess players. He is evangelical about his task, and believes that it is only a matter of time before a blind player will become a Grandmaster. The film focuses on three teenagers: Sai Krishna, Anant and Darpan. They are blind for different reasons, deal with their situations differently and hail from different backgrounds. The poorest of them, Anant, fails in part because of lack of encouragement from his parents. The teenagers compete in competitions in Stockholm, Belgrade and Rhodes, but in the final showdown the most talented of the team, Darpan, is forced to concede defeat.

The documentary ends where it started, in Mumbai, with Jadhav beginning the whole process all over again.



# Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)

USA 2014  
Director: Alejandro G. Iñárritu  
Certificate 15 119m 12s

See Feature  
on page 28

## Reviewed by Violet Lucca

In Kenneth Lonergan's 2011 film *Margaret*, there are three brief scenes in which the protagonist Lisa sits in a theatre audience: in a multiplex, an off-Broadway playhouse and at the Metropolitan Opera. The first two are moments of piquant satire, whereas the last is somewhere between awareness, heartbreak and catharsis; in a certain way, each marks a new phase of how she's processing trauma. Alejandro G. Iñárritu's *Birdman*, on the other hand, incorporates aspects of all these theatres and audiences but instead offers up benighted 'commentary' on celebrity, coated in operatic bluster and winking reflexivity. The cumulative effect reinforces stereotypes of 'artists' rather than serving as an invitation to see what the creative process and creative types are really like.

But what makes this work truly insufferable is the sugary archness that permeates the plot and dialogue, which try to pass themselves off as profound: Riggan Thomson (Michael Keaton), the former star of a cowl-wearing superhero franchise, first appears levitating while meditating in his dressing room, wearing only Y-fronts. (This is preceded by a shot of a meteor flaming out as it hits the Earth.) There is not a line but a gulf between art that's accessible and that which is overbearing and obvious, and here you can almost feel Iñárritu's breath as he whispers into your ear: "Get it? He was Batman. Now he's baring his soul, he's trying to lift himself up by doing my movie, where he's a has-been who's writing/directing/acting/producing an off-Broadway play. Get it?"

Although there's something undeniably graceful and impressive about the camera's movements, the dialogue and the way the actors are blocked often deflate the emotions the film is building towards. It's no surprise when, right after Riggan takes actress Lesley (Naomi Watts) aside to praise her talent and say how fortunate he is to have her in his play, his girlfriend Laura (Andrea Riseborough), who's been hovering just inside the frame the entire time, sidles up to Lesley and says, sadly, "We've been together two years and he's never said anything like that to me."

Mocked by an internal monologue of his screen persona (who sounds like Christian Bale's gravelly Batman), Riggan is able to channel the superhero's telekinetic powers: he makes a light fitting fall on an actor he doesn't want in his production, securing a much stronger but volatile replacement (Edward Norton). As his anguish grows, so do his powers and visions. While these moments are used for broad dark comedy, they often feel a little too quirky to be truly subversive, or are simply excuses for grandiose CGI spectacle, such as when Riggan jumps off a building to commit suicide and instead flies through the air up Park Avenue, arriving at the St James Theatre in time for the curtain call.

That particular flight of fancy and the aforementioned levitation scene are clearly references to Fellini's backstage fantasia *8½* (along with nods to what birds and superheroes do). Yet unlike Marcello Mastroianni, who, despite all the noise around him, imparts a quiet *mono no*



Hell for feather: Edward Norton, Michael Keaton

aware with his whitened hair and perpetually pointed-down chin, the denizens of *Birdman* all too often and loudly announce their self-pity. Wearing a rotating selection of hairpieces, Keaton offers ham-handed I-messed-up variations to himself, to Laura, to his agent, his cast and his ex-wife Sylvia, who appears out of the blue in the third act to remind him of his past failures. His damaged daughter/assistant Sam (Emma Stone) takes a more active approach, screaming, "It isn't the 90s any more!" (Sharp as a tack, that one.) Not truly full-formed characters, the women of *Birdman* exist solely to be seduced and exasperated by the exotic plumage of male creativity. Female creativity, if present at all, is manifested as filling some void. Laura, cast in the play not for her talent but because of who she's sleeping with, temporarily pretends to be

pregnant – the centuries-old creative fiction of choice for manipulative, shittily written women.

However, the most prominent uncreative female is the hateful *New York Times* theatre critic who promises to pan Riggan's adaptation of Raymond Carver's 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love' sight unseen. Positioning herself with such posturing as being above Riggan's celebrity, she actually falls for one of the oldest theatre-of-cruelty tricks in the book: Riggan shoots his nose off on opening night, which causes her to pen a rave review claiming that he has reinvigorated the theatre with reality. (Riggan's replacement nose transforms his profile to be – you guessed it – more like Batman's.)

Insincere to its core, this cloying bit of Oscar bait is a backstage musical whose book was written by an investment banker. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Alejandro G. Iñárritu  
John Leshner  
Arnon Milchan  
James W.  
Skotchdopole

**Written by**  
Alejandro G. Iñárritu  
Nicolás Giacobone  
Alexander Dinelaris Jr  
Armando Bo

**Director of Photography**  
Emmanuel Lubezki

**Edited by**  
Douglas Crise  
Stephen Mirrione  
**Production Designer**  
Kevin Thompson  
**Drum Score**  
Antonio Sanchez

**Production Sound Mixer**  
Thomas Varga  
**Costume Designer**  
Albert Wolsky

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**Production Companies**  
Fox Searchlight Pictures and Regency Enterprises present a New Regency, M Productions, Le Grisbi production

Made in association with TSG Entertainment  
Financed in association with Worldview Entertainment  
Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development  
With the assistance of the Government of Canada – Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit  
Québec Production Services Tax Credit  
**Executive Producers**

Christopher Woodrow  
Molly Connors  
Sarah E. Johnson

**Cast**  
**Michael Keaton**  
Riggan Thomson  
**Zach Galifianakis**  
Jake  
**Edward Norton**  
Mike Shiner  
**Andrea Riseborough**  
Laura  
**Amy Ryan**  
Sylvia  
**Emma Stone**  
Sam Thomson  
**Naomi Watts**  
Lesley  
**Lindsay Duncan**

Tabitha Merritt Wever  
Annie  
Jeremy Shamos  
Ralph  
**Bill Camp**  
crazy man  
**Damian Young**  
Gabriel

**Dolby Digital/ Datasat**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox International (UK)

**New York, present day. Actor Riggan Thomson is tormented by the voice of Birdman, the superhero character he played in films in the 90s. He rehearses the Raymond Carver adaptation that he's producing, directing and acting in. A light fitting falls on an actor who was ruining the scene, injuring him. Mike, a temperamental but brilliant actor, is hired as his replacement. Riggan's girlfriend Laura tells him she's pregnant. During a preview performance, Mike swaps water for gin, causing the actors to fight in front of the audience. Later Mike goes on stage with an erection; his partner/co-star**

**Lesley is humiliated by this, and breaks up with him. A powerful critic threatens to give the show a bad review without seeing it. Riggan attempts suicide but instead flies back to the theatre. He goes to get some fresh air before the big finale but is locked outside the theatre and has to walk through Times Square in his underpants. Laura tells him that she's not pregnant; they break up.**

**On opening night, Riggan shoots and injures himself during the finale. He receives a rave review from the critic who hates him. He jumps out of the hospital window.**



## Black Sea

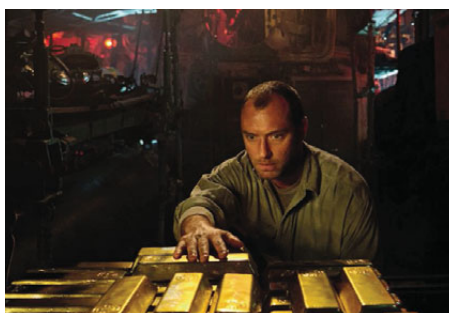
USA/United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Kevin Macdonald  
Certificate 15 114m 43s

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

With their dank corridors and forbiddingly cramped quarters, submarines have long proved potent cinematic stages for Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of an infernal *huis clos*. The correspondence is unlikely to have been lost on director René Clément, whose 1947 feature *The Damned* traced the descent into madness and murder of the ill-matched fugitives trapped aboard a drifting U-boat. Many other deep-sea thrillers opt instead to foreground external conflicts – enemy forces, extraterrestrials, even ghosts. Not so Kevin Macdonald's *Black Sea*, which follows Clément's lead in identifying the threat as expressly internal. Here, the plunge into the lower depths prompts man's worst impulses to surface.

Scripted by Dennis Kelly, creator of Channel 4's striking *Utopia*, *Black Sea*'s plot is a soggy spin on John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948): a calamitous, acrimonious hunt for fabled loot by ragtag desperados. As in *Utopia*, there's a rarefied quest object – a cache of Nazi gold amid the wreckage of a U-boat at the bottom of the titular sea – and a similarly pervasive whiff of conspiracy, as blue-collar pawns are manipulated by a shadowy corporate monolith. Jude Law continues the screen trend of awkwardly accented submarine captains (cf. Sean Connery in *The Hunt for Red October*, Harrison Ford in *K-19: The Widowmaker*), strenuously affecting a husky Aberdonian brogue as Robinson, a bluff ocean veteran who, after being laid off by his salvage firm, is hired by a mysterious backer to lead a clandestine search for the treasure. Corraling a half-western, half-Russian crew, the captain struggles to quell brewing rancour, despite promising equal shares of the booty.

As you'd expect, this is, like *Sierra Madre* and John Carpenter's *The Thing*, an intensely male breed of potboiler: its portrait of misfit men in an isolated place represents the flipside of Hawksian camaraderie, where someone is more likely to have his back stabbed than slapped. But it's



Das loot: Jude Law

hard to engage with Kelly's thinly drawn types: the snivelling company man (Scoot McNairy); the volatile sociopath (Ben Mendelsohn); the green rookie (newcomer Bobby Schofield). We learn from wispy flashbacks that Robinson is bitterly estranged from his wife (Jodie Whittaker) and son but he remains a dourly noble cipher. Even so, a bulked-up Law brings a burly physical presence to the action, making up for some occasionally strident delivery.

After tackling the sword-and-sandal epic (*The Eagle*) and post-apocalyptic drama (*How I Live Now*) in between his regular documentary work, Macdonald applies solid if anonymous craftsmanship to the pulpy material. If anything, he lets the tension boil over too quickly; the sub is barely underwater when hell breaks loose. The film intrigues with its high-concept preamble but its ensuing crises and violent skirmishes become monotonous. There are some arresting sequences: the initial exploration by divers of the U-boat – eerily preserved by the sea's anoxic waters – is as dread-inducing as a similar scene in James Cameron's *The Abyss* (1989), while a seemingly innocuous engine-room squabble turns literally incendiary. Through it all, Kelly's mordant political sense is ever-present, even if his dialogue is disappointingly leaden: in these Stygian waters, a banker is a lower form of life than a killer. **S**

## Bogowie

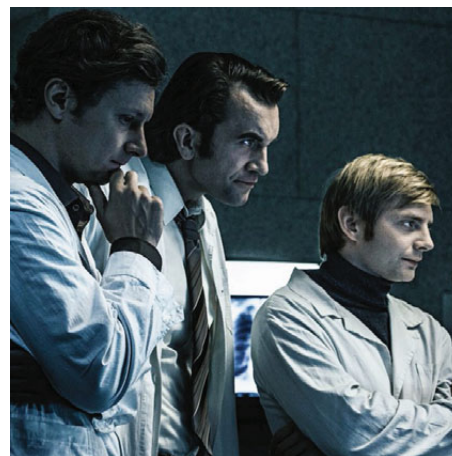
Poland 2014  
Director: Lukasz Palkowski  
Certificate 15 120m 24s

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Polish dramatisations of key historical events are frequently accused, not unfairly, of being overly reliant on a domestic audience's prior knowledge. A synopsis suggests that *Gods* might also fall prey to this tendency, since its subject, pioneering cardiac surgeon and bona fide national hero Zbigniew Religa (1938-2009), is all but unknown internationally. At least by name: he was, however, the subject of one of *National Geographic*'s most iconic 1980s images (explicitly restaged here as the film's closing image), showing him in a state of all too evident exhaustion – a colleague is slumped in a doorway – after performing a 24-hour heart transplant with less than state-of-the-art facilities.

So the big surprise about Lukasz Palkowski's cheerfully old-fashioned triumph-over-adversity medical drama is that absolutely no assumptions are made of its audience besides the possession of stomachs strong enough to handle frequent (albeit clearly essential) close-ups of gory surgical detail. Indeed, language and location aside, this would work perfectly well as a Hollywood crowd-pleaser (initial box-office returns suggest that Polish crowds have been very pleased indeed), right down to the use of western pop hits on the soundtrack, although a US treatment would doubtless crack down hard on the copious chainsmoking that dominates almost every scene.

But this is quickly established as a crucial aspect of Religa's personality: nervy and driven, determined to break down financial and religious opposition to his ambitions through sheer force of will. Tomasz Kot's intensely charismatic title-role performance sweeps all before it, turning what could have been drily logistical and ethical discussions into thrilling high-wire acts, the combination of his natural height and subtly low camera angles making him consistently appear a foot taller than his peers. When a colleague points out that it takes two years to train a cardiosurgical nurse, he blithely replies, "So there's no time to waste – get on with it!" He is similarly intolerant of objections to his announcement in the middle of a building site that his clinic, still under construction, will begin operating in 15 days. Religa is also given to towering rages and prone to capricious firings and rehiring (usually for trivial reasons), which Kot somehow makes charmingly eccentric rather than despotically monstrous.



Zone of blood: Bogowie

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Charles Steel  
Kevin Macdonald  
**Screenplay**  
Dennis Kelly  
**Director of Photography**  
Christopher Ross  
**Edited by**  
Justine Wright  
**Production Designer**  
Nick Palmer  
**Music**  
Ilan Eshkeri  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Rashad Omar  
**Costume Designer**  
Natalie Ward

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**Production Companies**  
Focus Features  
and Film4 present  
a Cowboy Films  
production  
A Kevin  
Macdonald film  
Developed with the  
support of Film4

**Executive Producers**  
Tessa Ross  
Teresa Moneo  
Merve Harzadin  
Jim Cochrane

**Cast**  
**Jude Law**  
Robinson  
**Scoot McNairy**  
Daniels  
**Ben Mendelsohn**  
Fraser  
**David Threlfall**  
Peters  
**Konstantin Khabenskiy**  
Blackie  
**Sergey Puskepalis**  
Zaytsev  
**Michael Smiley**  
Reynolds  
**Grigory Dobrygin**  
Morozov  
**Sergey Veksler**  
Baba  
**Sergey Kolesnikov**  
Levchenko  
**Bobby Schofield**  
Tobin

**Jodie Whittaker**  
Chrissy  
**Daniel Ryan**  
Kurston

**Dolby Digital /**  
**Datasat**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures  
International  
UK & Eire

**UK, present day.** Robinson, a submarine captain laid off by a salvage corporation, learns from ex-colleague Kurston that an anonymous backer requires volunteers for a clandestine operation to salvage gold from a wrecked Nazi U-boat lying at the bottom of the Black Sea. Robinson assembles a crew, but Kurston commits suicide before embarking; youngster Tobin takes his place. Once underwater, Robinson antagonises the backer's representative Daniels by promising that the crew will all receive an equal share of the loot. Animosity builds between Robinson's men and the sub's Russian contingent, culminating in the hot-headed Fraser's murder of a Russian engineer. A subsequent explosion kills several others and disables the sub's engine. Robinson makes peace with Russian navigator Morozov, who suggests that the U-boat may be within diving distance. Divers find the U-boat and retrieve the gold and also an engine drive shaft. Daniels reveals that Robinson's former employers are actually behind the operation, and intend to have Robinson arrested once the gold has been secured. Vowing to keep it, Robinson plots a course through perilous straits into Turkish waters. Daniels goads Fraser into killing the sub's pilot; the sub crashes and floods. Robinson sacrifices himself to ensure that Morozov and Tobin escape to the surface with the gold.



There is much medical gallows humour on offer, though Palkowski commendably holds back on easy point-scoring laughs at the expense of life in communist Poland. Indeed, aside from a confrontation between Religa and a pair of official goons sent to spy on him, politics outside the immediately localised and pressing kind is conspicuous by its absence, despite the real-life Religa going on to become one of Poland's highest-profile politicians (he was health minister from 2005-07, and for a while was considered a serious presidential candidate). But the film is right to concentrate on the brief but pivotal 1983-86 period of Religa's career: by any yardstick, this is a ferociously compelling human-interest story, and Palkowski, Kot and their colleagues expertly push every relevant button. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Piotr Wozniak-Starak

#### Screenplay

Krzysztof Rak

#### Director of

Photography

Piotr Sobocinski Jr

#### Editor

Jarosław Barzan

#### Art Director

Wojciech Zogala

#### Music

Bartosz Chajdecki

#### Sound Recordist

Jarosław Bajdowski

#### Costumes

Ewa Gronowska

@Watchout

Productions sp.

z.o.o., Orange Polska

S.A., Agora S.A., Born

To Film Productions

sp. z o.o., Poreczenia

Kredytowe sp.

z.o.o., Fundacja

Sztuki Filmowej

Ingenium, D35 S.A.

#### Production

Companies

Watchout

Productions

presents

#### Co-producers:

Orange Polska

S.A., Agora S.A.,

Poreczenia

Kredytowe Spółka

z.o.o., Europejski

Fundusz Rozwoju

Wsi Polskiej, Switch

It On Spółka z.o.o.,

Digital 35 S.A.,

Fundacja Sztuki

Filmowej Ingenium

Production

Company: Watchout

Productions

Co-financed by

Polski Instytut

Sztuki Filmowej

Jan Moll

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

Cast

Tomasz Kot

Zbigniew Religa

Piotr Glowacki

Marian Zembala

Szymon Piotr

Warszawski

Andrzej Bochenek

Magdalena

Czerwinska

Anna Religa

Jan Englert

Professor Wacław

#### Stikowski

Zbigniew

Zamachowski

Stanisław Pasyk

Kinga Preis

Ewa's mother

Sonia Bohosiewicz

transplant

patient's wife

Władysław

Kowalski

Jan Moll

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

## Bonobo

United Kingdom 2013

Director: Matthew Hammett Knott

Certificate 15 82m 57s

### Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

The unknown is often more enticing than our humdrum realities, no more so than for 18-year-old Lily, the protagonist of Matthew Hammett Knott's British comedy debut *Bonobo*. In this case the unknown is a commune overseen by a hippie-ish woman called Anita, where sex is applied to conflict resolution and reconciliation – infinitely more alluring than the law degree Lily's just dropped out from. That Anita's theories, which are based on the lifestyle of the bonobo monkey, sound to Lily's widowed mother Judith like the basis for a cult is hardly surprising, particularly when her only child is using it as a launch-pad to fly the nest.

With all women in the lead roles, and a particular emphasis on middle-aged female transformation, it's certainly refreshing that nothing in *Bonobo* requires men to save the day. Or it would be if the script, co-written by Hammett with Joanna Benecke, weren't so stuffed with clichés, reinforced by a soundtrack which underlines key aspects of the lyrics in the style of *There's Something About Mary*. Nevertheless, even if the central premise pretty soon starts to feel overstretched, *Bonobo* can at least boast some fine performances, not least from Tessa Peake-Jones as Judith, and particularly Josie Lawrence, who improbably manages to bring some gravitas to proceedings; and it does ultimately manage to wring some extra comic capital from that old chestnut, English middle-class 'awkwardness', rendered here in all its possible cringing variations. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Farhana Bhula

#### Written by

Matthew

Hammett Knott

Joanna Benecke

#### Director of

Photography

James Aspinall

#### Film Editor

Sean Barton

#### Production

Designer

Katie Ann MacGregor

#### Music

Eugene Fejgelson

#### Production

Sound Mixer

Richard Miller

#### Costume Designer

Sally Cairney

#### @Bonobo Films

Limited

#### Executive Producer

Richard Holmes

#### Cast

Tessa Peake-Jones

Judith

Josie Lawrence

Anita

James Norton

Ralph

Eleanor Wyld

Lily

Carolyn Pickles

Celia

Patricia Potter

Eva

Orlando Seale

Malcolm

#### Harriet Kemsley

Helen

Milton Lopes

Peter

Will Tudor

Toby

#### In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Distributor

Fable Films

Warsaw, 1983. Cardiac surgeon Zbigniew Religa is determined to achieve Poland's first successful heart transplant following the failure of the only previous attempt by Jan Moll in 1969, but he is constantly prevented from taking risks that might ensure his patients' survival. When Ewa, a young girl, dies on his operating table, Religa is convinced that a transplant could have saved her. He relocates to provincial Zabrze to open a specialist cardiac clinic. In August 1985, its inaugural operation is a success despite a mid-point power failure. However, because it was carried out without official permission, the clinic's hard-won government grant is suspended. The arrival of a patient facing imminent death forces Religa to try a transplant, despite the lack of any proper infrastructure and a Ministry of Health attempt to seize his equipment. His furious reaction to the latter leads to him securing the necessary funds. A potential donor is found but Religa has to talk his grieving parents and his patient's devoutly Catholic wife into permitting the operation to go ahead on 5 October 1985. The patient dies after six days, and two subsequent attempts also fail – for the latter, Religa uses a pig's heart in the absence of a donor. A depressed Religa considers giving up but Jan Moll and Ewa's mother persuade him to attempt a fourth. It is a success (the patient lives for seven more years). Religa becomes a national hero.

UK, the present. Middle-aged widow Judith is worried about her 18-year-old daughter Lily, who has joined what she thinks is a sect. In fact a group of youngsters overseen by middle-aged Anita have set up a commune based on the lifestyle of the Bonobo monkey, in which all social conflicts are resolved by having sex. Deciding that she'll 'rescue' Lily, Judith turns up at the commune, only to be told that she'll have to wait until she's ready to talk to her daughter without incriminating her. Judith herself starts opening up, but at a party rejects Anita's advances. Back home, Lily tells her mother that she has to decide what she wants. Judith admits that she's a lesbian and that Lily needs time to think about her future. Meanwhile, sex itself becomes a problem for the group, and it dissolves. When mother and daughter return to the commune, everyone hugs and kisses farewell.

## Bringing Tibet Home

USA/Republic of Korea 2013

Director: Tenzin Tsetan Choklay

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

"Some might say that my work is political, but I hope it's just honest," says artist Tenzing Rigdol near the start of this documentary about one of his most ambitious projects – though he is, of course, well aware that as an artist of Tibetan ancestry whose work usually draws on Tibetan subject matter, it's political by definition. For instance, an eerily beautiful reclining figure with flames instead of a face can be subjected to multiple interpretations, but since the film precedes this image with clandestine footage of a Tibetan monk setting fire to himself, we're nudged in one particular direction.

That said, Tenzin Tsetan Choklay's film generally refrains from overt soapbox-mounting. The 1949 Chinese invasion is referred to in matter-of-fact fashion, as is the present situation whereby it's impossible for Rigdol to enter Tibet to obtain the raw materials for his work. Indeed, the whole purpose of his 2011 installation *Our Land, Our People* is to subvert the Chinese-mandated order of things by recreating an authentic piece of Tibetan land in Dharamsala, India (the present residence of the Dalai Lama), with the aid of 20,000 kilos of actual Tibetan soil.

The film serves as supporting evidence that Rigdol and his colleagues really did obtain the soil from Tibet. For entirely understandable reasons, no footage was taken inside the country itself, but we get to see a brief glimpse of the smuggling operation across the Sun Kosi river, achieved by means of an illegally installed zip wire. The bulk of the film is devoted to Rigdol's attempts to obtain and transport the soil, much of which involves lengthy waits in Kathmandu for calls from his anonymous fixer, which usually combine news of a further unexpected hitch with a demand for more money to pay off yet another unidentified official. Even when the soil safely reaches Nepal, transporting it to Dharamsala



The day the earth moved: Tenzing Rigdol



is fraught with further difficulties. In short, alongside the film's voiceover musings about the experience of Tibetans in exile, it's a straightforward triumph-over-adversity scenario, with plenty of suspense along the way – although, as Rigdol himself observes, the soil ultimately undergoes a journey not dissimilar to that of the many Tibetan refugees who also only reached Dharamsala after constant changes of plan and heart-stopping moments of near-disaster. This was clearly not intended from the outset, but it gives the film more potency than a simple record of the creation of a temporary art installation might otherwise have achieved.

As the film's presenter/narrator, Rigdol is an engaging presence throughout, his uncertainty about the project's validity remaining palpable up to the point of its unveiling as a nondescript dais covered in earth. But the overwhelmingly emotional reaction of the visitors, many of whom have never touched actual Tibetan soil, and some who last did so many decades before, speaks for itself. Here, Rigdol achieves something that artists often strive for in vain: an almost childishly simple idea creating a genuinely transcendent bond between the work and its audience. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Tenzin Rigdol Tenzin Tsetan Choklay	Choklay	<b>In Colour</b> [1.78:1]
<b>Written by</b> Tenzin Tsetan Choklay	©Five by Nine Films	<b>Part-subtitled</b>
<b>Camera</b> Tenzin Tsetan Choklay	<b>Production Companies</b> Produced by Five by Nine Films	<b>Distributor</b> Day for Night
<b>Edited by</b> Bernadine Colish Tenzin Tsetan Choklay	With support from individual donors on Kickstarter, AFA Fellowship Fund, Busan International Film Festival, Isdell Foundation, nextPix Productions,	
<b>Music</b> <b>Composed by</b> Joel Diamond Tenzin Choegyal	Shelly and Donald Rubin Foundation, IFP Independent Filmmakers Labs	
<b>Location Sound</b> Tenzin Tsetan		

New York City, 2011. Artist Tenzin Rigdol has drawn extensively on his Tibetan heritage, despite never having set foot in his ancestral homeland. But when his Tibetan-born father dies without seeing his native country again, Rigdol vows to bring an authentic piece of Tibet to his fellow exiles by obtaining 20,000 kilos of authentic Tibetan soil and inviting them to walk on it. Rigdol flies to Kathmandu, where he meets his project manager, childhood friend Tipten Tsering. After agreeing that no Tibetans will be involved with the project, they hire a go-between to arrange the soil collection, but the initial seven-day schedule lengthens inexorably, as do the costs. Rigdol visits the Friendship Bridge on the Tibet-Nepal border, but after being accosted by Chinese police he decides that it's too dangerous to personally supervise the job. When the bags of soil are ready for shipment, the Chinese shut the bridge as a general security measure. After being transported via a smuggling route, the bags eventually end up in Dharamsala, India, the residence of the Dalai Lama and one of the biggest Tibetan refugee communities. Before the work (now titled 'Our Land, Our People') is unveiled on 26 October 2011, Rigdol presents a tray of Tibetan soil to the Dalai Lama, who writes 'Tibet' in it with his finger. The installation is a huge success. On its third and final day, visitors are allowed to take soil samples away with them. Within hours, all 20,000 kilos have disappeared.

## The Circle

Switzerland 2014  
Director: Stefan Haupt  
Certificate 15 101m 33s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

The sprightly, cheerful Ernst Ostertag and Röbi Rapp, interviewed in old age, pop up throughout Stefan Haupt's docudrama, which depicts the pair's involvement in a semi-secret 1950s Swiss gay group known as the Circle. The film's dramatisation of their earlier years heralds a personal happy ending delivered by the longevity of their relationship. Others in their group weren't so fortunate, however, and the 50s/60s sections of the film cover several murders – rent boys turning on their clients, then exonerated by courts that make them seem to be victims – and the suicide of the principal of Ernst's school after he is outed to his family by a police investigation.

Photographs of Ernst and Röbi in their heyday, seen under the end credits, suggest they enjoyed themselves fairly spectacularly even in an era of comparative repression. (Rapp, a child movie actor in *Der Menschlein Matthias*, 1941, is still charismatic and was plainly a knockout drag act in 1956, upstaging his pretty decent impersonator Sven Schelker.) Some of the problems the Swiss gay community had with the authorities were side effects of liberal laws: partying visitors from European countries where homosexuality was illegal attracted unwelcome attention. The most interesting, underexplored character here is 'Rolf', the slightly prissy editor of *The Circle* (actually a film actor named Karl Meier). Rolf is finally put out of business – and driven into a depressive spiral – not by the establishment crackdown but by the relaxation of censorship in Denmark and Holland, which allows more explicit gay content magazines on to the market. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Ivan Madeo Urs Frey	Co-produced by SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen, SRG, SSR	<b>Cast</b> <b>Röbi Rapp</b> <b>Ernst Ostertag</b> interview partners <b>Sven Schelker</b> young Röbi <b>Matthias Hungerbühler</b> young Ernst <b>Anatole Taubman</b> Felix <b>Marianne Sägebrecht</b> Erika Rapp <b>Stephan Witschi</b> Karl Meier, Rolf
<b>Screenplay</b> Stefan Haupt Christian Felix Ivan Madeo Urs Frey	With funding from Zürcher Filmstiftung, Swiss Federal Office of Culture, Kulturamt Thurgau, George Foundation, Ernst Göhner Stiftung, Stage Pool Focal, Migros Kulturprozent, Heinrich Hössli Stiftung, Corymbo Stiftung, Schwulenarchiv Schweiz, Suissimage, SSA, Queersicht Filmfestival, Network, Succès Cinéma, Succès Passage Antenne, SRG, SSR	<b>In Colour and Black and White</b> [1.78:1] <b>Subtitles</b>
<b>Director of Photography</b> Tobias Dengler	In co-operation with Ascot-Elite Entertainment Group	<b>Distributor</b> Matchbox Films
<b>Editing</b> Christoph Menzi	<b>Film Extracts</b> Krawall (1970) Zürcher Impressionen (1961)	Swiss theatrical title <b>Der Kreis</b>
<b>Production Designer</b> Karin Giezendanner		
<b>Music</b> Federico Bettini		
<b>Direct Sound</b> Ingrid Städeli		
<b>Costumes</b> Catherine Schneider		
©Contrast Film		
<b>Production Companies</b> Contrast Film presents a film by Stefan Haupt		
Produced by Contrast Film		

Zurich, 1956. Gay teacher Ernst Ostertag joins The Circle, a semi-covert gay group formed around a pioneering magazine. He falls in love with Röbi Rapp, a hairdresser who does a drag act at The Circle's regular dances. Though homosexuality is legal in Switzerland, several high-profile murders in the gay community lead to police persecution. In 1967, 'The Circle' finally ceases publication. In 2003, Ernst and Röbi become Switzerland's first same-sex married couple.

## Diplomacy

France/Germany 2014  
Director: Volker Schlöndorff  
Certificate 12A 84m 3s

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Like so many European films, *Diplomacy* begins with a long list of co-producers. Alongside Gaumont and ARTE France Cinéma on the credits, we also see Westdeutscher Rundfunk and Südwestrundfunk. This is, after all, a film adapted from a French play (Cyril Gély's *Diplomatie*) by a German director, Volker Schlöndorff (*The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*, *The Tin Drum*), in which two French actors reprise their roles from the original stage production (André Dussollier as Swedish consul Raoul Nordling, Niels Arestrup as German general Dietrich von Choltitz) with support from a host of German actors realising the bilingual script. Yet if the film is a paragon of Franco-German collaboration, its content keeps teasing the viewer with an altogether less salubrious counterfactual. For *Diplomacy* is set on the eve of the Allied liberation of Paris from Nazi occupation, as Choltitz, then the city's military governor, had to decide whether or not to raze the French capital – and its populace – to the ground on the direct orders of a bitter, beleaguered Hitler.

Garrisoned in the opulent Hôtel Meurice, with a perfect view from his balcony of the city that he is minded to annihilate, Choltitz is on the point of passing this order down the chain of command when Nordling enters his suite via a secret entrance once used by Napoleon III to visit a lover. What follows is itself the deftest of seductions, as Nordling, an experienced ambassador who has already had successful dealings with Choltitz on the freeing of political prisoners, proceeds with great tact to dissuade his host from an extreme scorched-earth policy of no real strategic value, and convince him instead to surrender to the advancing Allied forces, who will reach the city's centre within hours.

Insubordination and capitulation do not come easily to a long-serving soldier (from a military family), and humanity might not be expected from a man who had previously followed orders to liquidate the entire Jewish population of Sevastopol. But Nordling, played by Dussollier with a stern-faced gravity that is occasionally lightened by a flash of sly impishness, persists in appealing to Choltitz's higher values and in accommodating and assuaging his fears. The rest, as they say, is history, with jaw ultimately triumphing over war.

Though this is essentially a two-hander, the claustrophobia of *Diplomacy* comes less from its well-furnished setting than from the sense that Choltitz's hand is being forced by all manner



Monuments man: *Diplomacy*



## Dumb and Dumber To

USA 2014

Directors: Peter Farrelly, Bobby Farrelly



Back in the saddle: Jim Carrey, Jeff Daniels

### Reviewed by Jason Anderson

It's easy to lament the declining productivity of the once pre-eminent laugh factory of Peter and Bobby Farrelly in the 20 years since the release of *Dumb & Dumber*. Yet the brothers' fading relevance may have less to do with the erratic quality of their own films in the interim than the distressing trajectory of Hollywood screen comedy in general. Despite the success of game changers such as Judd Apatow's *The 40 Year Old Virgin* (2005), Larry Charles's *Borat* (2006), Todd Phillips's *The Hangover* (2009) or Paul Feig's *Bridesmaids* (2011), American comedies rarely have a place among the superhero smash-'em-ups, animated hijinks and fantasy fare that now dominate the yearly box-office tally sheets both in the US and abroad. It's a far cry from the 80s

golden age of Ivan Reitman, as well as the run of hits the Farrellys enjoyed in the wake of their first teaming with Jim Carrey and Jeff Daniels.

Inspiring a wave of lowbrow imitations eager to match its almost \$250m worldwide gross by getting ever grosser, the first *Dumb & Dumber* introduced a sensibility that was gleefully puerile yet still rooted in the kind of gag work that Fatty Arbuckle might've embraced with comparable zeal. It also benefited greatly from the up-for-anything enthusiasm of its two stars. The marginally smarter of the duo, Daniels's Harry is the sheepish, frizzy-haired sadsack whose perpetual air of worry is interrupted by moments of infectious childlike joy. As for Lloyd, Carrey complicated the character's similarly rascally nature with hints of a



### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Sidonie Dumas Francis Boespflug <b>Screenplay</b> Cyril Gely Volker Schlöndorff Based on the play <i>Diplomatie</i> by Cyril Gely <b>Director of</b> <b>Photography</b> Michel Amathieu <b>Editor</b> Virginie Bruant <b>Art Director</b> Jacques Rouxel <b>Original Music</b> <b>Composed by</b> Jörg Lengberg <b>Sound Recorder</b> Philippe Garnier <b>Costumes</b> Mirjam Muschel	<b>Film production</b> In co-production with ARTE France Cinéma, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Südwestrundfunk With the participation of Canal+ and Ciné+ With the support of Eurimages, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication (Centre national de la cinématographie et l'image animée), Région Île-de-France in partnership with CNC, Procipec et l'Angoa, MFG Filmförderung Baden-Württemberg, Filmförderung- sanstalt (FFA)	<b>General</b> Dietrich von Choltitz <b>Burghart Klausner</b> Captain Ebernach <b>Robert Stadlober</b> Lieutenant Bressendorf <b>Charlie Nelson</b> conciierge <b>Jean-Marc Roulot</b> Jacques Larvin <b>Stefan Wilkening</b> Corporal Mayer <b>Thomas Arnold</b> Lieutenant Hegger
<b>Cast</b> André Dussollier Consul Raoul Nordling Niels Arestrup	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1] <b>Subtitles</b>	<b>Distributor</b> Studiocanal Limited  French theatrical title <b>Diplomatie</b>

Paris, 25 August 1944, before dawn. With the Allies due to arrive in the city centre within hours, General Dietrich von Choltitz prepares to carry out Hitler's orders to level the capital with rigged explosives.

The Swedish consul Raoul Nordling enters Choltitz's suite at the Hôtel Meurice via a secret entrance and tries to persuade the general to disobey his orders and surrender to the Allies. Against Nordling's arguments that the order lacks strategic value, that destroying Paris and her civilians would be against the laws of war, that the French capital is a cultural treasure and that history – and the French – would never forgive either Choltitz or Germany for such an act, Choltitz cites the principle of duty, the Allies' phosphorus bombing of Hamburg and his legal right to destroy Paris as an 'act of war'. When two SS men arrive and menace Choltitz about the consequences for his family if he disobeys orders, Nordling offers safe passage to Switzerland for Choltitz's wife and children. Choltitz calls off the detonation. About to set off the explosives in defiance of Choltitz's order, Lieutenant Hegger is shot by French engineer Larvin. Choltitz surrenders.

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Charles B. Wessler Bradley Thomas Bobby Farrelly Peter Farrelly Riza Aziz Joey McFarland <b>Written by</b> Sean Anders John Morris Peter Farrelly Bobby Farrelly Bennett Yellin Mike Cerrone Based on characters created by Bennett Yellin, Bobby Farrelly,	<b>Peter Farrelly</b> <b>Director of</b> <b>Photography</b> Matthew F. Leonetti <b>Edited by</b> Steven Rasch <b>Production Designer</b> Aaron Osborne <b>Score</b> Empire of the Sun <b>Sound Mixers</b> Mary Ellis Bartek Swiatek <b>Costume Designer</b> Karen Patch	<b>Production Companies</b> Universal Pictures and Red Granite Pictures present in association with New Line Cinema a Conundrum Entertainment/ Charles B. Wessler production A Riza Aziz and Joey McFarland production A Farrelly Brothers movie <b>Executive Producers</b> Brad Krevoy Steve Stabler,	<b>Marc S. Fischer</b> David Koplan Danny Dimbort Christian Mercuri <b>Film Extracts</b> <i>Dumb and</i> <i>Dumber</i> (1994)	<b>Laurie Holden</b> Adele Pinchelow <b>Rachel Melvin</b> Penny Pinchelow <b>Kathleen Turner</b> Fraida Felcher <b>Steve Tom</b> Dr Bernard Pinchelow <b>Don Lake</b> Dr Meldmann <b>Patricia French</b> Ms Sourpuss <b>Bill Murray</b> Ice Pick	<b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1]  <b>Distributor</b> Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
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Rhode Island, present day. Visiting his best friend at a mental hospital, Harry discovers that Lloyd has been faking a catatonic condition for two decades as a practical joke. Their reunion is marred by Harry's news that he needs a new kidney. Harry's search for a donor leads to Fraida, an old girlfriend who reveals that they may have a daughter, Penny, given up for adoption years before. Smitten after seeing a photo of Penny, Lloyd agrees to help Harry find her. Arriving at Penny's home in Maryland, they learn that she is attending a conference in El Paso on behalf of Dr Pinchelow, a famous scientist who is also her adoptive father. Seemingly as dimwitted as Harry and Lloyd, Penny has forgotten to bring a package that contains an invaluable invention. Pinchelow asks the two to deliver it. Pinchelow's wife Adele – who

has been secretly poisoning her husband – sends her lover Travis to steal the package. Travis is accidentally killed while trying to murder the pair. In El Paso, the conference organisers mistake Harry for Pinchelow and treat him as a distinguished guest. Lloyd woos Penny but realises that he may be her father, since he also had a relationship with Fraida. Adele threatens the pair and Penny, but Pinchelow arrives with the FBI, telling her that he knows about her scheme and that the package contains only cupcakes. Before she is arrested, Adele shoots Harry in the shoulder. At the hospital, Lloyd reveals that he had a kidney extracted for Harry, only to discover that Harry faked his kidney crisis as payback for Lloyd's earlier ruse. Fraida tells Harry and Lloyd that neither could be Penny's father.



more grown-up (read: hornier) side. Yet these dummies retained greater appeal than many crasser counterparts thanks to their fundamental sweetness, devotion to each other and naive persistence in the face of challenges that should've ended their misadventures long before they reached adulthood. (Rightly believing that Harry and Lloyd were only funny if they were grown men, the Farrellys grumbled when in 2003 New Line made a misguided stab at franchise-building with *Dumb and Dumber: When Harry Met Lloyd*, a charmless prequel with the two characters as high schoolers.)

This sequel's success confirms both the enduring potency of the original formula and the Farrellys' recent improvements in quality control. *Movie 43* (2013), a multi-director sketch anthology that was a longtime pet project for the team, might've been universally reviled but both the snarky marital comedy *Hall Pass* (2011) and the under-heralded revamp *The Three Stooges* (2012) had flashes of the fearlessness and ingenuity of the brothers' 90s heyday. With its often exquisitely staged slapstick, the latter film seems to have primed the pump for the new effort's unremitting stream of pratfalls, goofball banter, sight gags and whatever you want to call a punchline involving an alley cat farting out feathers from a freshly slaughtered collection of rare birds. Of course, there are misses among the hits – particularly disappointing are the so-so fantasy sequences depicting Harry and Lloyd's respective dreams of suburban-dad contentment and studly supremacy – but *Dumb and Dumber To* barrels along with such vigour that it feels churlish to complain.

Since he's spent much of the past few years aiding Aaron Sorkin's campaign against inanity and hypocrisy on HBO's *The Newsroom*, it's perfectly understandable that Daniels relishes the many opportunities to drop his pants. Meanwhile Carrey, coming off a run of screen turns whose greatness went cruelly unrecognised – such as his gay con artist in *I Love You Philip Morris* (2009) – seems similarly uninhibited and committed to the tasks at hand. As big and broad as some of the jokes may be, the smallest ones best demonstrate his dexterity and finesse, whether it's a matter of Lloyd messily gobbling up a hot-dog wiener or eating a banana in a funeral home and tossing the peel into an occupied casket.

Working from a script that passed through many hands during a five-year development period, the Farrellys can be just as nimble. Though they largely favour an amiable brand of stupidity that avoids the crueller excesses of so many of *Dumb & Dumber's* successors (including their own movies), the directors spare some room for bits that are more sophisticated and more surreal. The former category includes the mock TED conference that Harry and Lloyd have little trouble disrupting. The latter reaches its apex when a throwaway-gag sign for Barbara Hershey Highway is followed up with another that designates the Barbara Hershey Museum and Espresso Shack. In the eyes of any comedy fan who stayed loyal to Carrey or the Farrellys in the fallow years since their first triumph together, that's the best kind of dumb. **S**

## Eastern Boys

France 2012  
Director: Robin Campillo  
Certificate 15 129m 5s



A word to the good: Olivier Rabourdin, Kirill Emelyanov

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

There is a scene near the end of *Eastern Boys* in which Chelsea (Edéa Darcque), concierge at the out-of-town Halt Hotel catering mostly to illegal immigrants, asks long-term guest Boss (Daniil Vorobjev) about his relationship with the 14-year-old boy (Beka Markozashvili) who is the youngest male member of Boss's tight-knit group. Though quite probably neither the older brother nor the father that Chelsea suggests, Boss acts as both, keeping an extended family of young Ukrainians closely together for a range of criminal activities that finance their food and board while reinforcing his own patriarchal powerbase. His name – though it is more than a title – defines the relationship.

Most of *Eastern Boys* concerns the evolving relationship between a different older and younger man – though Boss and his dealings with his gang always remain a dynamic counterpoint.

In the first and briefest of the film's four headed chapters, middle-aged, middle-class Parisian Daniel (Olivier Rabourdin) first approaches 'Marek' (Kirill Emelyanov) at the Gare du Nord, assuming (correctly) that the young man is a hustler. Marek, though prowling the road in front of the station with Boss and the other Eastern European boys, is not exactly a street kid, and Daniel, though certainly gay, is no queen, but nonetheless this chapter's title, 'Her Majesty, the Street', encapsulates the gulf – ethnic, cultural, economic and generational – that exists between this unlikely pairing as they bump up against each other in Paris's central hub of mobility, transit and exchange. When the two negotiate a place and a price for sex, they are also initiating a togetherness, however momentary, that will eventually lead to more permanent home-making.

The second chapter ('This party of which I

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Hugues Charbonneau  
Marie-Ange Luciani  
**Written by**  
Robin Campillo  
**Cinematographer**  
Jeanne Lapoirie  
**Editors**  
Robin Campillo  
Stéphanie Léger  
**Art Director**  
Dorian Maloine  
**Original Music**

Arnaud Rebotini  
**Sound**  
Olivier Mauvezin  
**Costumes**  
Isabelle Pannetier

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**Production Companies**  
Les Films de  
Pierre presents  
With the participation  
of Canal+, Centre

National du Cinéma  
et de l'Image Animée  
With the support of  
Région Aquitaine,  
Département des  
Pyrénées-Atlantiques  
in partnership  
with CNC  
In association with  
Film Distribution,  
Cofinova 8  
With the collaboration  
of L'Agence ECLA/

Commission du  
Film Aquitaine  
With the support of  
Procirop Angoa  
A Les Films de  
Pierre production

**Cast**  
Olivier Rabourdin  
Daniel  
Kirill Emelyanov  
Rouslan, 'Marek'

**Daniil Vorobjev**  
Boss  
**Edéa Darcque**  
Chelsea  
**Bislan Yakhiev**  
Bislan  
**Mohamed**  
Doukouzov  
**Mohamed**  
Camila Chakirova  
Camila  
**Aitor Bourgade**  
Guillaume

**Beka Markozashvili**  
Little Marek

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Peccadillo  
Pictures Ltd

**Paris, present day.** At the Gare du Nord, Daniel singles out hustler Marek from a gang of Eastern Europeans led by Boss, and invites him to his home for sex the following day. Instead, the whole gang invades Daniel's apartment, drinking, partying, fighting – and loading most of the furniture on to a van outside. Later, Marek comes back to the apartment and Daniel has paid sex with him. Over time, as Daniel refurbishes the apartment, Marek also slowly becomes a fixture. Wishing to see Marek more, Daniel keeps renegotiating the terms of their relationship, until eventually, having learnt of the

young man's Ukrainian background, the loss of his family in Chechnya and his real name (Rouslan), Daniel asks him to move into the spare room (which they redecorate together), and stops sleeping with him. Hoping to steal back his passport, which Boss keeps locked away, Rouslan returns to the hotel where his gang and other illegal immigrants live. Boss beats him and locks him, bound and gagged, in a storeroom. Helped by a concierge, Daniel frees Rouslan and calls the police, who arrest the gang. Boss returns to Daniel's apartment for revenge but finds it empty. Daniel applies to adopt Rouslan as his son.



## Electricity

United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Bryn Higgins  
Certificate 15 95m 48s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

What do those who suffer from epilepsy see when they're experiencing a fit? The way this sympathetic British drama pictures it, the hallucinations vary from flickery distortions akin to a sort of visual static to surreal visions of moving sky and sea, enveloping darkness and even an out-of-body sense of suspended time – strikingly achieved by director Bryn Higgins and DP Si Bell via a pinhole camera. These sequences, often arriving without warning in the midst of a story about a young woman's search for a missing sibling, are certainly effective on their own terms, signalling the terrifying loss of control felt by those temporarily dragged into an alternate reality by their condition. If the film's aim was to raise wider consciousness about epilepsy and the daily lot of those who have to live with it, it clearly succeeds, even if it does perhaps err on the side of making its visualisation almost too aesthetically intoxicating.

Viewing these experiences from the inside, as it were, builds our sympathy for Agnieszka Deyn's embattled protagonist Lily, whose life is predicated on coping with the effects of sudden attacks. Friends and colleagues need to be aware of her plight, and she must be cognisant at all times of the route home to safety should she be struck down, as inconveniently happens on the Saltburn seafront just as she's dolled up for a date. While this immediately has us on Lily's side, the longer-term narrative effectiveness of the subject matter is somewhat open to debate. Hard to fault the imagination and application with which the filmmakers and their committed leading lady render the series of traumatic fits, but the law of diminishing returns does rather kick in, perhaps because Lily's relationship with her condition is something of a narrative dead-end: it's always going to be with her, whether controlled by heavy medication or not. Indeed, even though screenwriter Joe Fisher's adaptation of Ray Robinson's novel shows how her hard-earned



Current issues: Agnieszka Deyn, Tom Georgeson

resilience in the face of epilepsy equips Lily for the daunting challenge of tracking down her missing prodigal brother Mikey amid London's seething metropolis, this detective-style strand of the story – the resolution of which may yet be within Lily's control and key to her future happiness – remains a discrete entity throughout. Moreover, since the search for the errant Mikey is pieced together with sundry over-convenient plot developments, one might uncharitably ponder whether the artful flourishes of the debilitating episodes aren't there to enliven the otherwise fairly low-key intrigue on offer.

Still, if the subject and storyline never quite mesh, former model Deyn proves herself a captivating screen presence. Somehow her combination of alabaster features and gangling frame proves absolutely in sync with Lily's particular amalgam of vulnerability and defiance, and those tantalising contradictions play out in every frame to engrossing effect. Deyn definitely holds this big-hearted, effortful, flawed offering together, and for all the mixed response that *Electricity* engenders, it surely leaves us keenly anticipating her upcoming appearance in Terence Davies's long-gestating Lewis Grassic Gibbon adaptation *Sunset Song*. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Clare Duggan  
Bryn Higgins  
**Screenplay**  
Joe Fisher  
Based on the novel  
by Ray Robinson  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Si Bell  
**Editor**  
Ben Yeates  
**Production Designer**  
Beck Rainford  
**Original Music**  
John Lunn  
**Sound Recordist**  
Stuart Wright  
**Costume Designer**  
Andrew Cox

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Productions Limited/  
The British Film  
Institute/The  
Wellcome Trust  
**Production  
Companies**  
BFI presents in  
association with  
Alison Morgan

and the Wellcome  
Trust a Stone City  
Films production  
Developed with  
the support of  
the Regional  
Attraction Fund  
With the support  
of the MEDIA  
Programme of the  
European Union  
Made with the  
support of the BFI's  
Film Fund and the  
Wellcome Trust  
**Executive Producers**  
Christopher Collins  
Alison Morgan  
Rachel Hillman  
Clare Duggan

**Cast**  
**Agnieszka Deyn**  
Lily O'Connor  
**Lenora Crichlow**  
Mel  
**Christian Cooke**  
Mikey O'Connor  
**Paul Anderson**  
Barry O'Connor

**Tom Georgeson**  
Al  
**Saffron Coomber**  
Rachel  
**Alice Lowe**  
Sylvia

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

North-east England, present day. Lily, a twentysomething cashier in a seaside arcade, suffers from epilepsy. Despite heavy medication, the attacks have continued since childhood, when her alcoholic mother threw her down the stairs. News of her mother's death prompts Lily to contact older brother Barry, a card-playing hustler, who agrees to sell their mother's house. Lily insists on giving a share to Mikey, the younger brother who protected her from bullying and was subsequently taken into care. Barry gives her the name of Mikey's former girlfriend, Sylvia, and Lily heads to London to find him, only to be tricked by homeless girl Rachel, who claims to know Mikey but steals Lily's belongings. After she has a fit on the underground, Lily is given shelter by kindly secretary Mel. Sylvia points Lily to Balham electrician Dave, who may know Mikey's whereabouts. Lily is attracted to Dave but has a post-coital fit, after which the doctor tells her that she is at risk of a fatal attack. Later, an aggressive Mikey, convinced that Lily is defrauding him, trashes Mel's place. Lily stops taking her medication and goes out clubbing with a forgiving Mel; a massive fit leaves her in hospital – where Barry brings Mikey's share of the inheritance. Lily passes the money on to Mikey. She returns home, determined to continue without medication.

am a hostage') sees Daniel getting more than he bargained for when the entire gang, led by Boss, turns up for the assignation at the apartment, intimidates the unwilling host, and strips the place of all its valuables and furnishings. It is a smash and grab in which power and property are transferred, even if Boss terrorises his own gang no less than Daniel. In the third, longest chapter ('What we make together'), a sheepish Marek returns to Daniel's now empty apartment, apparently to make amends as much as money but, as businesslike as Daniel's Asian cleaner, offering this patron his special services. Yet what starts as a mutually exploitative liaison, transacted entirely through the sex that Marek provides and the cash that Daniel pays, becomes something else over time. As Daniel gradually refurbishes the apartment, he also starts attending more to Marek's history, identity and desires. Where previously Daniel had communicated with Marek through the lingua franca of broken English, he now proceeds to teach his young lover the local tongue, and begins to build a new life with him. Daniel also learns, and starts using, Marek's real name, Rouslan – even as Boss continues to insist on calling him Marek. The power relations in their sex shift too, as Rouslan slowly transforms from passive servant to active participant and receiver of pleasure – until eventually Daniel removes sex and payment altogether from the equation, granting Rouslan a room of his own and a key to come and go as he pleases. In counterbalance, Boss ruthlessly controls Rouslan's day-to-day movements, violently rejects the young man's bid to change adopted families, and denies him any love, respect or trust.

In these shifting and contrasting circumstances, with Daniel replacing Boss as father figure for Rouslan, the film also rings the changes on western Europe's relations with its eastern neighbours, dramatising different kinds of abuse and assimilation while (partially) transcending boundaries of ethnicity and class. Written and directed by Robin Campillo, who previously helmed *The Returned* (2004) and has regularly penned the scripts of Laurent Cantet's films (*Time Out*, *Heading South*, *The Class*), *Eastern Boys* is dominated by shots of – and through – windows, as it keeps altering perspectives and contemplating outsiders from within. It begins and ends as something like a thriller, with the initial intimidating invasion of Daniel's home by the Ukrainian gang ultimately offset by Daniel's no less tense encroachment into Boss's fiefdom (charted in the fourth chapter, 'Halt Hotel: Dungeons and Dragons'). With this narrative symmetry comes a suggestive symmetry of character, as both Boss and Daniel are seen exhibiting forms of exploitation, control and paternalism, and each leaves the other's domestic life in ruins (from their different sides of the law). Mostly, though, *Eastern Boys* is a highly nuanced love story. As Campillo observes Daniel and Rouslan struggling to find give and take in their uneven, ambiguously defined relationship, he poses questions about what distinguishes sexual from familial ties, immigration from naturalisation and a home from a mere walled (and windowed) space. **S**



## The Face of Love

USA 2013  
Director: Arie Posin  
Certificate 12A 91m 54s

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Like many exaggerated plaudits that have worked their way into everyday usage – “hilarious”, “awesome” – the phrase “I could listen to them read the phonebook” is all too often used. While Morgan Freeman’s phonebook performance was put to the test in *The Lego Movie* – and was well received by critics and audiences alike – the enjoyment to be gleaned from Ed Harris and Annette Bening getting through the yellowed pages of *The Face of Love* is reserved for a select few. Riffing off Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* and Kieslowski’s *The Double Life of Veronique*, Arie Posin’s imitation game concerns a wealthy woman, Nikki (Bening), who loses her beloved husband in a drowning accident and, finding his double (Harris) five years later, seduces him. Aside from the gender reversals – including a sleepwalking Robin Williams in the Barbara Bel Geddes role – the motifs of the Greatest Film of All Time (or at least for the next eight years) are efficiently ticked off: Nikki encounters her husband’s doppelgänger Tom at an art museum; he brings her a bouquet of flowers to paint during their first lesson together (he’s an art professor); he loves to swim in her pool. There’s also a scene where she follows him in his car but, hey, that could be in any movie.

The fundamental queasiness of Nikki’s despairing, selfish choice to allay her guilt (and mix up pronouns) with Tom is teased out by her relationship with her daughter Summer (Jess Weixler) and long-time neighbour Roger (Williams), from whom she unsuccessfully tries to hide the affair. A hearty dose of reality is inserted in this otherwise fanciful tale when Summer arrives unannounced at Nikki’s home while recovering from heartbreak of her own, and becomes furious when she sees Tom. (As with the source material, it’s all too easy to fall into the traps of gorgeous photography and the filmic grammar of love and forget how sick the whole arrangement is.) However, that’s where the reinvention ends. For a story that should be full of intriguing variations, most of the film’s 92 minutes vacillate between the substandard and the utterly conventional. Burdened by baldly terrible dialogue – “I could take a bath in how you look at me” – and twists that are



Double or nothing: Annette Bening

visible from a mile away (including a Chekhov’s gun of a main character’s dicky ticker), the reimagining offers up far less than the original.

But then there are the performances. Bening, with her delicate features and anxious smile, is truly expansive, and believably traverses everything from emotionally gutted to giddy schoolgirl to passionate, mature woman to neurotic manipulator. Her fidgety deviousness is never separate from her genuine affection, which makes the pathology of her character far more complicated than Posin’s script allows for. Harris too demonstrates some serious control – undoubtedly more than in his previous role as a painter in *Pollock* (2000): although his character is utterly besotted with Nikki for reasons that transcend words or reason (it’s all wrapped up in that bath-look), he’s never goofy or a doormat, which makes his final decision to leave her all the more powerful.

This rare showcase of post-middle-aged talent demonstrates how the youthful actors who are entrusted with far meatier material are actually the counterfeits. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Bonnie Curtis  
Julie Lynn  
**Written by**  
Matthew McDuffie  
Arie Posin  
**Director of Photography**  
Antonio Riestra  
**Edited by**  
Matt Maddox  
Arie Posin  
**Production Designer**  
Jeannine Oppewall  
**Music**  
Marcelo Zarvos  
**Sound Mixer**  
Robert Anderson  
**Costume Designer**  
Judiana Makovsky

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Production Companies

**Exclusive Media**  
presents a  
Mockingbird Pictures  
production  
in association with  
Trinity Diversified  
Film Fund and  
Charles Solomon Jr  
**Executive Producers**  
Benjamin  
Castellano-Wood  
Theresa  
Castellano-Wood  
Paige Dunham  
Maxine P. Lynn  
Ruth Mutch  
Amy Lynn Quinn  
Les Ware  
Amy Ware

**Cast**  
Annette Bening  
Nikki Lostrum

**Ed Harris**  
Garrett Mathis/  
Tom Young  
**Jess Weixler**  
Summer  
**Amy Brenneman**  
Ann  
**Robin Williams**  
Roger Stillman  
**Linda Park**  
Jan  
**Jeffrey Vincent**  
Parise  
Nicholas

**Dolby Digital**  
In Colour  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Signature  
Entertainment

**Los Angeles, the present. On a whim, Nikki visits the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where she sees a man who looks exactly like her dead husband, who drowned at a resort in Mexico five years ago. She goes to the museum on many subsequent days, waiting for the man to return. She discovers that he is Tom Young, an art professor at Occidental College. Nikki goes to Tom’s classroom; she says that her husband has left her and asks Tom to give her painting lessons. After a few lessons, Tom asks her out. She insists they go to a restaurant that she and her husband used to frequent. Tom begins to paint again. One day, Nikki’s daughter Summer comes home unexpectedly, finds Tom there and becomes enraged. Nikki asks Tom to go to the Mexican resort where her husband died. Seeing a photograph in the resort’s bar, Tom realises that he’s Nikki’s husband’s double. Nikki runs into the ocean and Tom rescues her.**

**A year later, Tom has died. Nikki goes to his wake and sees all the pictures that she inspired him to paint.**

## The Grandmaster

Hong Kong/USA 2013  
Director: Wong Kar-Wai  
Certificate 15 108m 7s

See Feature  
on page 20

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Wong Kar-Wai’s previous foray into martial arts, 1994’s *Ashes of Time*, elided nearly all combat, so it’s surprising that *The Grandmaster* opens with an extended showcase for famed action choreographer Yuen Woo-Ping at his finest. With no real introduction, Tony Leung’s Ip Man is pitted against a dozen men at night during a torrential deluge, the heavy rain captured in both step print and languorous high-frame-rate slow-motion as ripples hit the ground – two characteristically Wongian signatures in the middle of a fight that’s otherwise impersonal in the best possible way. Each punch, kick and impact is captured cleanly and coherently, Wong serving the spectacle of a big brawl rather than resisting its adrenalised charms.

The first developed and last released of a cluster of Ip Man films, *The Grandmaster* unsurprisingly distinguishes itself from its visibly cheaper, much more functional competitors through its pervasive melancholy. Wong’s decision to make a movie about Ip (*wing chun* master, Bruce Lee’s teacher and a figure revered in his own right) is consistent with his recurring emphasis on exile and the notion of a return to a geographical and personal past. Ip Man’s life took him from Foshan in south China to Hong Kong, and his family suffered during the Japanese occupation of China during World War II, with his wife dying afterwards from an extended illness exacerbated by the war; his trajectory covers a lot of literal ground while also forcing his character into a permanent reverie for people, places and traditions that are no longer accessible.

The action is, to some extent, frontloaded, diminishing considerably after the first half-hour climaxes with a battle between Ip and Gong Er (Ziyi Zhang), the daughter of a northern Chinese master and great unconsummated love of Ip’s life. They twirl in slow motion, their faces and bodies coming dangerously close, satellites hovering near one another, forever out of true grasp and denying their mutual attraction. The music is Stefano Lentini’s Italian-language ‘*Stabat Mater*’, as ever, Wong insists on his right to go for the emotional jugular with any music he cares to choose, regardless of incongruity.

In Wong-world, to look into the past is a form of melancholy self-communion rooted in a cultural and political legacy; the distinction between the personal and the broadly political is ultimately irrelevant. Gong Er speaks for Wong when, at her final meeting with Ip, she makes explicit the mutual attraction that has been latent until then, but doesn’t seem to regret not following through: “How boring it would be to have no regrets.”

It’s not surprising that Wong would turn towards the language of martial arts to find a new perspective for his recurring obsessions. Jia Zhangke relied on *wuxia* tropes and set-ups for *A Touch of Sin* (2013), and Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s next film will be a period martial-arts work; like them, Wong takes martial arts as an agent of cultural memory very seriously. There are many dull patches here – yearning looks can slide into mere mopey and mooning – but *The Grandmaster* mostly proves that Wong



## The Green Prince

Germany/United Kingdom/Israel 2014

Director: Nadav Schirman

Certificate 15 100m 59s

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict's matrix of ethical Gordian knots has rarely been elucidated as clearly, and tied as tightly, as in this documentary from Nadav Schirman. Though tacitly Israeli, the film can't help but bristle with the utter impossibility of a situation in which choosing humanitarian principles on the ground is akin to deciphering a koan.

The subject is Mosab Hassan Yousef, son of firebrand Hamas leader Sheikh Hassan Yousef and for some years the most important undercover informant working for Israel's Shin Bet security service. The set-up smacks immediately of pro-Israeli propaganda but the film dredges up ambivalences by the truckload: a typically radicalised Arab teen spurred by the napalm rhetoric of his father (seen entirely in news footage) and many imprisonments, Yousef is arrested after an eventless gun run and, after being offered spy work by the Shin Bet, is sent for six months to the Hamas-run section of an Israeli prison. There, he witnesses Hamas torturing and killing scores of prisoners (they've all been offered espionage as a choice and so are suspected of being traitors). After also being raped, he decides to spy on Hamas and his father to prevent as many suicide bombings and other bloodlettings as he can.

Schirman's film is essentially a two-hander – Yousef, seething with wide-eyed urgency, narrates his tale in English directly to the camera, and his testimony is intercut with that of Gonen Ben Yitzhak, his Shin Bet handler, who waxes artisanally about the nuances of spycraft, recruitment and agent manipulation, but who is ambivalent about his role in his Arab spy's career. (Yitzhak violated Shin Bet rules by treating Yousef as a friend and comrade, and was eventually relieved of his duties.) This pas de deux runs from the late 90s for over a decade of bloody espionage, during which time Yousef matured into a man without a truthful identity of his own, and even had his own father arrested rather than see him assassinated. (He was working to quash the Second Intifada as his father was promoting it at the top of his lungs at public rallies.) Of course, the stress is palpable – even “raping your own mother” would not, Yousef claims, be as shameful in his culture



Agent of change: Mosab Hassan Yousef



Mist of fury: Tony Leung

will have no trouble finding more new ways to push himself. The film's diasporic scale and separated lovers in wartime occasionally recall *Doctor Zhivago's* worst excesses, long gazes across snowy landscapes and all, but at its best *The Grandmaster* expands the personally compact and geographically sprawling longing of *In the Mood for Love* (2000), rendering the politics shaping its characters' lives more explicit than usual without leadenly straining to make the connection. If Wong's application of super slow-mo and other trademarks flirts (as always) with self-parody, at his best there's still the feeling that a moment of true longing has been earned rather than insisted on through programmatic application of emotional music and slowed-down visuals.

The UK will be receiving the Harvey Weinstein cut of Wong's film, executed in collaboration with the director. Wong's explanation is that he wanted to make sure the vital cultural context that Hong Kong audiences would get immediately wasn't lost on Western viewers – a patently disingenuous explanation given the massive changes on display; the mogul has run amok. The film has been cut from 130 minutes to 108 and heavily rearranged (Weinstein has managed to render it less linear than it was previously). There are captions identifying all and sundry (not a bad move, actually) and explanatory title cards that actively assume viewers to be idiots. Also added is an expository Leung voiceover that's utterly devoid of emotion, which arguably works in a contrapuntal way.

Bottom line: big-screen viewing will help, but unless you want to experience the thought experiment of watching a Wong film in which every elision and ambiguity has been systematically removed or debased, a Region 0 DVD of the uncut work may be a better choice. 6

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Wong Kar-Wai  
Jacky Pang Yee Wah

#### Screenplay

Zou Jingzhi

Xu Haofeng

Wong Kar-Wai

#### Story

Wong Kar-Wai

#### Director of Photography

Philippe Le Sourd

William Chang

Suk Ping

Benjamin Courtines

Poon Hung Yiu

#### Production Design

William Chang

Suk Ping

Alfred Yau Wai Ming

#### Original Score

Shigeru Umebayashi

Nathaniel Mechaly

#### Sound Design

Robert Mackenzie

#### Costume Designer

Shandy Lui

#### Stunt Co-ordinators

Yuen Shun Yi

Tony Ling

Yuen Cheung Yan

#### Action

#### Choreographer

Yuen Wo Ping

@Block 2

Pictures Inc.

#### Production Companies

The Weinstein Company,

Annapurna Pictures,

Block 2 Pictures,

Sil-Metropole

Organisation Limited

present a Jet Tone

Films, Sil-Metropole

Organisation

Limited production

A Wong Kar-Wai film

This film benefited

from the French

Tax Rebate for

International

Production

#### Executive Producers

Song Dai

Chan Ye Cheng

Megan Ellison

#### Cast

Tony Leung

Ip Man

Ziyi Zhang

Gong Er

#### Chang Chen

The Razor

Zhao Benshan

Ding Lianshan

Xiao Shenyang

San Jiang Shui

Song Hye Kyo

Zhang Yongcheng

Yuen Wo Ping

Chan Wah-shun

Lau Ka Yung

Yong

Cung Le

Iron Shoes

Wang Qingxiang

Master Gong

Baosen, 'Gong Yutian'

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

#### Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

Chinese

theatrical title

Yi dai zong shi

Foshan, 1930s. Locally famed for his skill in Wing Chun martial arts, Ip Man is recognised as the foremost practitioner in south China after fighting elderly master Gong Yutian and his daughter Gong Er. During World War II, Ip's family dies during the Japanese occupation. After the war, he moves to Hong Kong and opens a martial arts studio; there, he's reunited with Gong Er, now an opium addict who eventually returns home to die.

An epilogue notes that Ip passed on the Wing Chun style to many generations, not least through his pupil Bruce Lee.



as spying for Israel. It's a sentiment that, given the history, you can easily fathom. Frustratingly, the two witnesses, and the film, overlook the larger picture of the widely condemned injustice of the Israeli occupation and the imperialist conditions that compelled the creation of Hamas in the first place, something only an Israeli or occupation-sympathetic filmmaker would care to do. But the film is intimate enough that you can't really blame the two men, since they lived the war on the secret front lines, and had to live with themselves if their actions and decisions resulted in more – or fewer – innocent bodies. Schirman tries to balance the Hamas demonising with occasional news reports of Israel's overwhelming air strikes and invasions, but the narrative's primary position is that Hamas is a homicidal plague and the Shin Bet is merely and humanely trying to control it, for everyone's good. The bizarre and fascinating co-dependence of Yousef and Yitzhak naturally suggests this angle, but it's also the deftest of propaganda feints, the abnegation of political responsibility by honing in on these individuals, as if the micro-experience of political-ethnic conflict suffices as a model for the whole.

It never does. *The Green Prince* (Yousef's Shin Bet code name) is remarkably gripping, but its two lone voices hardly register even the quandaries about Israel's action that were ruefully entertained by the six retired Shin Bet directors in Dror Moreh's *The Gatekeepers* (2012). The 'spy game' is and always has been pulpishly bewitching, if we are dissuaded from considering what the elaborate mechanism is trying to achieve. 📞

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Nadav Schirman John Battsek Simon Chinn	Documentary Company	Ministry of Culture & Sport – The Israeli Film Council
<b>Written by</b> Nadav Schirman Based on the book <i>Sons of Hamas</i> by Mosab Hassan Yousef	<b>Production Companies</b> An A-List Films, Passion Pictures, Red Box Films	Developed and produced with the support of the Hessen Film Fund and The Hessen Ministry of Culture
<b>Cinematography</b> Hans Fromm Giora Bejach Raz Dagan	production Co-produced with Telepool, Uzrad	<b>Executive Producers</b> Thomas Weymar Sheryl Crown Maggie Monteith
<b>Edited by</b> Joelle Alexis Sanjeev Hathiramani	In association with the Documentary Company, Yes	<b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1]
<b>Original Music</b> Max Richter	Docu, Sky Atlantic With the support of Bavarian Film Fund, German Federal Film Fund, Hessen Film Fund, New Israeli Film Fund for Cinema and TV	<b>Distributor</b> Curzon Film World
<b>Sound Design</b> Alex Claude	Produced with the support of The	
©A-List Films GmbH and The		

A documentary about Mosab Hassan Yousef, son of Hamas leader Sheikh Hassan Yousef and for more than a decade the most valuable spy in the Palestinian territories working for Israel's Shin Bet security service. The story is recounted by Yousef himself, and also by his Shin Bet handler, as we follow him from radicalised teen to his decision to turn against Hamas. Having witnessed brutality in a Hamas-run section of an Israeli prison and having been subjected to rape, he decides to start working secretly with the Israeli forces to subvert Hamas's various campaigns of terrorism and suicide bombings. After his handler is fired, Yousef abandons both causes and emigrates to the US.

## Hello Carter

United Kingdom 2013  
Director: Anthony Wilcox  
Certificate 15 77m 24s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

First-time writer-director Anthony Wilcox's day-in-the-life comedy can't seem to choose a groove and stick to it successfully. After a drifting first act in which the hapless Carter (a preternaturally amiable Charlie Cox) is kicked from pillar to post by the vicissitudes of London life, the film unexpectedly morphs into a chase thriller. There's a distinct whiff of *After Hours* (1985) as Carter finds himself wrongly accused of a crime and then stumbles into a low-key romance with Jodie Whittaker's no-nonsense recruitment consultant.

Wilcox is determined to keep the dialogue and visuals realistic (veteran DP Andrew Dunn paints a heartless, everyday London flowing around Carter). But this sits oddly with the forced chase plot, which needs constant, faintly illogical tweaks to keep its wheels turning. Carter, whose passivity is irritating rather than engaging, isn't much of a hero, and surrounding him with markedly quirky friends and relatives (Judy Parfitt is wasted as a wacky elderly aunt) doesn't osmotically imbue him with charm. Only Paul Schneider, whose *Parks and Recreation* sitcom chops manage to make Wilcox's deadpan dialogue stand up, has any real impact as anger-challenged Hollywood has-been Aaron. 📞

### Charlie Cox



### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Julian Bird Fiona Neilson	<b>Companies</b> JLB Productions present in association with Revolution Films a JLB Production	Tara Stephens <b>Henry Lloyd- Hughes</b> Nicholas Renfrew <b>Antonia Thomas</b> Mischa <b>Annabelle Wallis</b> Kelly <b>Judy Parfitt</b> Miriam
<b>Written by</b> Anthony Wilcox	<b>Director of Photography</b> Andrew Dunn	<b>Dolby Digital In Colour</b> [2.35:1]
<b>Editor</b> Dan Farrell	<b>Producers</b> George Karamanos Michael Winterbottom Andrew Eaton	<b>Distributor</b> JLB Productions
<b>Production Designer</b> Rebecca Rainford Carly Reddin	<b>Original Music</b> Andrew Ralher	
<b>Sound Recordist</b> William Whale	<b>Costume Designer</b> Stephanie Collie	
©Hello Carter Limited Production		

London, present day. Homeless and jobless, Carter agrees to deliver a mysterious letter to Tara for Aaron, brother of his ex-girlfriend Kelly, in order to get Kelly's new phone number. Tara, mistaking him for the babysitter, leaves him with her baby son Andre. The neighbours call the police, suspecting him of kidnapping. Carter finds himself on the run with Aaron, who is Andre's estranged father, and Jenny, an office worker he keeps running into. Carter and Jenny become close. Carter rescues Aaron, Jenny and Andre in a police car chase. He reunites Tara with Andre. Tara forgives Aaron. Carter receives but immediately deletes Kelly's number. He and Jenny start a relationship.

## Horns

USA 2013  
Director: Alexandre Aja  
Certificate 15 119m 58s

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

*Horns* opens with Daniel Radcliffe – still to sprout the bone-hard growths of the film's title – waking from a drunken stupor. It's an image that is, intentionally or otherwise, fitting for a number of reasons. Not so long ago Radcliffe was widely derided for courting the press with the prim revelation that he drank alcohol on the set of family-film franchise *Harry Potter*. Here we see him with tell-tale empty bottle, prone on his character's kitchen floor, in what, one hopes, is self-parody. The hangover of *Harry Potter* and its hero's Goody Two-Shoes persona has been hard for Radcliffe to shake. So could *Horns* be the Alka-Seltzer that he's been looking for – a character of his own age, of his own time, unlike the roles he played in *The Woman in Black* and beat-gen biopic *Kill Your Darlings*? Almost, but not quite.

French-born horror aficionado Alexandre Aja directs the former child-actor in this adaptation of the bestselling novel by Stephen King's son Joe Hill. Radcliffe is Ig Perrish, a DJ in a New Hampshire logging town who is demonised by locals following the murder of his girlfriend Merrin (Juno Temple). Though Ig is under investigation by police, it becomes apparent through flashbacks that in all probability he is innocent. But Ig doesn't always act in his own best interests.

One supposes that Radcliffe relished the opportunity to play a character neither good nor evil but yawning between the two – an average Joe who acts on impulse rather than servicing expectations within and without the world of the film. Ig is a young man summarily condemned by his community for a bout of bad behaviour, branded with a pair of devil horns after he urinates on Merrin's memorial in a fit of grief-stricken anger, soaking votive candles and a plaster of Paris Madonna. He then becomes the very embodiment of his vilification: "When they looked at me, they saw a devil."

Ig is initially (and understandably) perturbed by the swellings at his temples, which draw raw confessions from everyone he meets, nearest and dearest included. (The film's puerile humour is derived from these dark and frank admissions, usually sex-related and unbecoming to womankind.) Coming around to the method in their paranormal madness, Ig uses his horns' bewitching power to smoke out Merrin's killer – which means meting out *Seven*-style punishments to sinners along the way.

Tonally, *Horns* recalls Stephen Sommers's excellent *Odd Thomas* (2013), an entertaining clairvoyant comedy-horror with a cartoonish aesthetic, underpinned by a poignant love story that caught one unawares. The look of *Horns* is likewise rigged to loudspeakers – vulgarly colourful, spendthrift with blood – while a moody soundtrack by Marilyn Manson, Eels, Pixies and Tindersticks ties the emo-love element to the murder-mystery thread. Still, *Horns* isn't nearly so successful at tying its odd ends together.

Aja's film is on the pulse in some ways, troublingly outmoded in others. As he hears people's unsolicited confessions, Radcliffe has a sad but collected look that seems especially contemporary, like someone jaded by the culture of confessionalism on social media.



## Horrible Bosses 2

USA 2014  
Director: Sean Anders  
Certificate 15 108m 18s

### Reviewed by Anna Smith

While a bungled murder plot dominated the 2011 comedy *Horrible Bosses*, this sequel focuses on an inept kidnapping. After being thwarted in their small-business attempts by an unscrupulous boss, Nick (Jason Bateman), Kurt (Jason Sudeikis) and Dale (Charlie Day) decide to kidnap the man's son, Rex. The flaws in their plan are clearly signalled to the audience, leaving the central trio as objects of mockery, and placing the onus on comedy over either thrills or identification with the protagonists.

Initially, there are laughs. The men's stupidity is fitfully amusing as they continually sabotage their own plot (using their real names over the radio, losing Nick's credit card during a break-in attempt, etc). The opening scene on a morning television show features an effective old-school physical gag in which two men demonstrate a bathroom shower invention, unwittingly casting shadows that resemble a sexual act. The naivety wears thin, however, and jokes become repetitive. And although he is the most sensible one, Nick's intellect seems to ebb and flow according to the demands of the plot, which doesn't bear too close an examination.

The most layered character is Rex, a vain, unpredictable rich kid who's given a charismatic, occasionally surreal edge by Chris Pine. Kurt, Dale and eventually Nick's misplaced adoration of Rex gives the story a potential heart, but this is squandered as the film pauses for crude sex pieces, many of them driven by sex addict Julia (Jennifer Aniston), the former boss who harassed Dale in the first film. A game Aniston is in her element as the controlling, predatory Julia, her sexual confidence and power in marked contrast to the men's artless ogling. But with Julia's entrance comes one of the more troubling aspects of the *Horrible Bosses* series: the comical treatment of her attempts to force herself on Dale. In this sequel, the characters jokingly reference the fact that Julia drugged and assaulted Dale in the past, a crime that remains unpunished. Meanwhile Julia is unrepentant – using sex-addict sessions



Jason Sudeikis, Jason Bateman, Charlie Day

as sexual opportunities – and continues to be objectified by both the camera and the male characters (aside from Dale). The only other notable female character is Dale's underwritten wife Stacey, relegated to looking after baby triplets who appear to have been created solely for the purpose of a recurring verbal gag.

*Horrible Bosses 2* has the ability to make a generous audience laugh, but in the hands of *We're the Millers* director Sean Anders it neglects to develop its characters even to the extent of the first film. Original screenwriter Michael Markowitz is notably absent, as is the darker comic streak of *Horrible Bosses*. And while Rex and his father Bert are doubtless horrible bosses, Nick, Kurt and Dale's revenge attempts are too irrational to invite sympathy. Their idiocy may be funny in passing, but their personal stories feel like the invention of a committee hired to replicate the success of a slight, but slightly more effective, blockbuster comedy. Ⓢ



The horn identity: Daniel Radcliffe, Juno Temple

(The term 'oversharing' comes to mind, the Chambers dictionary's word of 2014.) On the other hand, a gay-cops subplot and stoning-like shaming of a waitress for vanity won't (or shouldn't) sit well with modern audiences.

*Horns* is, finally, structurally unsound: the time-will-tell nature of the horns' divining power drains the film of real suspense. A patchy voiceover suggests that what was integral to the book is preserved here out of duty to readers: yet another hangover, this one from the source text. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Cathy Schulman  
Riza Aziz  
Joey McFarland  
Alexandre Aja

**Screenplay**  
Keith Bunin  
Based on the  
novel by Joe Hill  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Frederick Elmes

**Edited by**  
Baxter  
**Production**  
**Designer**  
Allan Cameron  
**Music**  
Rob  
**Sound Mixer**  
Darren Brisker  
**Costume Designer**  
Carol Beadle

**Companies**  
RADIUS-TWC,  
Dimension Films and  
Red Granite Pictures  
present a Mandalay  
Pictures production  
A film by  
Alexandre Aja  
With the  
participation of  
the Province of  
British Columbia

**Executive**  
**Producers**  
Joe Hill  
Shawn Williamson  
Adam Stone  
Joe Gatta  
Christian Mercuri  
Danny Dimbort

**Cast**  
Daniel Radcliffe  
Ig Perrish  
Max Minghella  
Lee Tournau

**Joe Anderson**  
Terry Perrish  
**Juno Temple**  
Merrin Williams  
**Kelli Garner**  
Glenna Shepherd  
**James Remar**  
Derrick Perrish  
**Kathleen Quinlan**  
Lydia Perrish  
**Heather Graham**  
Veronica  
**David Morse**  
Dale Williams

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

New Hampshire, present day. DJ Ig is suspected of the recent murder of his girlfriend Merrin. He wakes one morning to discover that he has a pair of horns. Everybody, from his family to the local doctor, starts to behave unusually, unloading their secret, sinful thoughts in Ig's presence. Only Lee, Ig's friend and lawyer, is immune to the horns' effect. Using this new supernatural ability, Ig turns detective to find Merrin's killer, punishing along the way any individuals withholding evidence that proves him innocent. Flashbacks show that Ig met with Merrin on the night of her murder, and that she broke off their relationship. Ig confronts Lee after seeing that he's wearing Merrin's crucifix. When this is removed, Lee – unprotected – confesses that he murdered Merrin after she rejected his sexual advances. A fight results in Lee trapping Ig in a car and setting it alight. Ig, surviving the blaze, finds a letter from Merrin, explaining that she had terminal cancer and left him to spare him pain. Ig, possessed, kills Lee and dies from his injuries. He and Merrin are reunited in paradise.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Brett Ratner  
Jay Stern  
Chris Bender  
John Rickard  
John Morris

**Screenplay**  
Sean Anders  
John Morris  
**Story**  
Jonathan Goldstein  
John Francis Daley  
Sean Anders  
John Morris  
Based on characters  
created by Michael  
Markowitz  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Julio Macat  
**Edited by**  
Eric Kissack  
**Production Designer**  
Clayton Hartley  
**Music**  
Christopher YOUNG  
**Production**  
**Sound Mixer**  
Robert Sharman

**Costumes**  
**Designed by**  
Carol Ramsey

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Entertainment Inc.  
and RatPac-Dune  
Entertainment LLC  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
New Line Cinema  
presents in  
association with  
RatPac-Dune  
Entertainment  
a RatPac  
Entertainment/  
Benderspink  
production  
**Executive Producers**  
Toby Emmerich  
Richard Brener  
Michael Disco  
Samuel J. Brown  
Steve Mnuchin  
John Cheng  
Diana Pokorny

**Cast**  
Jason Bateman  
Nick Hendricks  
**Charlie Day**  
Dale Arbus  
Jason Sudeikis  
Kurt Buckman  
**Jennifer Aniston**  
Dr Julia Harris  
**Jamie Foxx**  
Dean 'MF' Jones  
**Chris Pine**  
Rex Hanson  
**Christoph Waltz**  
Bert Hanson  
**Kevin Spacey**  
Dave Harken

**Dolby Digital/**  
**Datasat**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Warner Bros. Pictures  
International (UK)

Los Angeles, the present. Nick, Dale and Kurt develop a product named 'Shower Buddy' and accept a large advance order from catalogue boss Bert Hanson, who helps arrange a bank loan. After manufacture, Hanson cancels: he plans to bankrupt the three friends so that he can take over the company.

Angry, the trio plot to kidnap Hanson's son Rex. Rex discovers their plan and offers to play along and take a cut of the ransom. Bert agrees to a \$500,000 ransom and calls the police, who follow him to the drop location. Bert is instructed to go alone to a car park, where Nick, Dale and Kurt plan to take the money and use Kurt as a decoy stand-in for Bert, leading the police off the trail. Rex will be posing as a victim in a warehouse.

Rex arrives at the car park and shoots his father dead. His trousers are bloodstained so he forces Kurt to switch. The trio's criminal adviser Dean 'MF' Jones – hoping to steal the money – drives by and picks them up, leading the police to the warehouse, hoping to beat Rex to it. Rex gets there first but is incriminated by his possession of Kurt's phone (in the trouser pocket) and arrested after a shootout. Most serious charges against the trio are dropped thanks to Dale taking a bullet for an officer; they continue with their business plans.



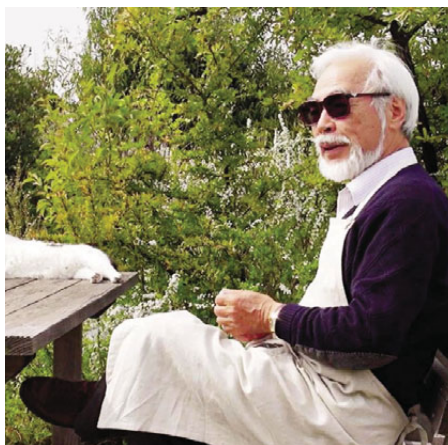
## The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness

Japan 2013  
Director: Sunada Mami  
Certificate PG 117m 45s

### Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

There's much primary material about Miyazaki Hayao in English, from behind-the-scenes documentaries on home releases of his films to two large books of his writings (*Starting Point* and *Turning Point*). It's impressive, then, that this two-hour documentary about the director, his colleagues and their studio gives a deeper sense of the man and his work process. It's a fond portrait, but never dewy-eyed. The main setting is the Ghibli animation studio, where we follow the avuncular, sometimes jovial, sometimes melancholic director, his white apron matching his trimmed beard and unlit cigarettes. Much of the film consists of conversations, which are given traction by shots of the changing seasons, graceful montages of Ghibli's ongoing life, and the studio's resident cat Ushiko.

It's easy to think of Miyazaki as a one-man band, conceiving his films from his storyboards up, as we're shown. However, the documentary is good at presenting his working relationships, especially his joshing, effortless rapport with Suzuki Toshio, his producer and promoter of three decades, who came from outside animation. (We see photos of Suzuki as a young, hungry-looking journalist.) Another prominent figure is Anno Hideaki. Today, Anno is the creator of the SF TV/film franchise *Evangelion* and was recently the subject of a mammoth retrospective at the Tokyo International Film Festival. As a youngster, Anno worked under Miyazaki, who recalls him being "like an alien... What planet did he come from?" Decades later, Anno joins Miyazaki's 2013 film *The Wind Rises* to voice its hero – we see



End of the line: Miyazaki Hayao

the plot hatched on screen, Miyazaki fascinated and tickled by the idea, while Anno looks comically ill-at-ease behind the microphone.

Far more evasive is Takahata Isao, Miyazaki's mentor, best known for his 1988 film *Grave of the Fireflies*. He's a running offscreen presence. In the period covered by the documentary, when Miyazaki was working on *The Wind Rises*, Takahata was making his own film, *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*, in a separate building. Some Ghibliophiles consider Takahata the better director, though when he finally appears near the film's end it's to claim graciously that his own artistic career was shaped when he came across Miyazaki's talent. "If I hadn't met Miyazaki, I wouldn't be here." The documentary doesn't record *Princess Kaguya*'s fate. It opened in Japan four months after *The Wind Rises* to very modest box office, though its reviews have been more glowing than those for Miyazaki's film.

The comments by Miyazaki, Suzuki and others feel genuine and uncensored, perhaps because of a feeling that the final end is nigh. Asked about Ghibli's future, Miyazaki, now in his seventies, says it will fall apart. At another point, he asks if his work is not merely a grand hobby. "Maybe there was a time when you could make films that matter, but now?" There's a tantalising suggestion by Suzuki that NHK, Japan's public broadcaster, is pressuring Ghibli not to make political comments, though *The Wind Rises* is about the lead-up to World War II. In what seems to be a tangent, we glimpse a colourful Japanese pop-media event (for niconico, the country's YouTube equivalent), with rightwing prime minister Abe Shinzo in attendance. The film suggests this is emblematic of Japan today – real-world issues cocooned in escapist apathy.

There's also a strand about Miyazaki's long-dead father. In an affecting scene, the director receives a letter describing a kind deed by his parent during the war. Through deft edits, the documentary fascinatingly suggests how Miyazaki's father is perhaps reflected both purposefully and coincidentally in the Anno-voiced hero of *The Wind Rises*.

*The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness* is directed by Sunada Mami, who previously worked under Koreeda Hirokazu (*Still Walking*). Mami's 2011 film, *Death of a Japanese Salesman*, concerned her own father's last days. ☺

## Kon-Tiki

Norway/United Kingdom/Malta/Germany/Sweden/Denmark 2012  
Directors: Joachim Rønning, Espen Sandberg  
Certificate 15 118m 48s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The remarkable feat of crossing the South Pacific on a balsa raft made Norwegian anthropologist Thor Heyerdahl a legend among 20th-century adventurers. His 5,000-mile journey in a traditional native vessel may not have convinced the scientific community to accept his theory that Polynesia was populated by South American seafarers but it did make him a bestselling author and his filmed diary *Kon-Tiki* took the Academy Award for Best Documentary in 1951. Brief clips of that film resurface in the end credits of this sleek CGI-assisted dramatisation, showing the modern-day cast to be a fair set of lookalikes for their illustrious forebears. Greater challenges faced directors Joachim Rønning and Espen Sandberg in generating suspense from a true-life tale whose outcome was already so well known – and indeed in finding something fresh and worthwhile to say about Heyerdahl's achievement.

There's a lot to admire in the vivid manner with which the events are brought to life, and the integration of location footage and digital effects is as seamless as budget and available technology would allow. The direction effectively conveys the claustrophobia of six men sharing a small raft, the life-threatening jeopardy they face from high seas, shark attacks and their vessel falling apart at the seams – and indeed the terror and majesty of being a tiny dot afloat on a huge expanse of ocean. We come away with the sense that Heyerdahl's visionary zeal could so easily have turned this into a suicide mission, and while the film generates a note of tension between him and his more sceptical (and somewhat undercharacterised) crew, it doesn't push too hard with it, preferring instead to keep the tone generally laudatory.

Given Pål Hagen's handsome yet slightly bland central turn as Heyerdahl, it's not altogether believable that he casts such a charismatic spell over his shipmates, though that may be precisely because the screenplay openly admits he's no superman, painting his eventual success as the result of equal parts blind faith, sheer luck and intelligent guesswork. Not quite a hagiography, then, though the film does rather run out of juice when assessing the wider context of Heyerdahl's enterprise, rooting his determination to prove his anthropological theories through heroic action as a familiar conflict between a convention-defying visionary and a fuddy-duddy establishment, and presenting his eventual arrival in Polynesia as a victorious resolution when in fact many in the academic community remained unswayed in their opposition. Moreover, the directorial flourish that sends the camera from the raft up to the very heavens and back again, essaying some expression of metaphysical grandeur,



The shore thing: Agnes Kittelsen

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Kawakami Nobuo  
**Written by**  
Sunada Mami  
**Director of Photography**  
Sunada Mami  
**Editor**  
Sunada Mami  
**Music**  
Takagi Masakatsu

©Dwango  
**Production Companies**  
Dwango presents an Ennet production  
In co-operation with Studio Ghibli  
**Film Extracts**  
*The Castle of Cagliostro*/  
*Kariosutoro no shiro* (1979)  
*Nausicaä of the*

*Valley of Wind*/  
*Kaze no tani no Naushika* (1984)  
*Tenku no shiro Laputa/Castle in the Sky* (1986)  
*My Neighbour Totoro/Tonari no Totoro* (1988)  
*Kiki's Delivery Service/Majo no takkyubin* (1989)  
*Porco Rosso* (1992)  
*Princess Mononoke/Mononoke-hime* (1997)  
*Spirited Away/Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (2001)  
*Howl's Moving Castle/Hauru no ugoku shiro* (2004)  
*Ponyo/Gake no Ue no Ponyo* (2008)  
*The Wind Rises/*

*Kaze Tachinu* (2013)  
*The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*  
*Kaguyahime no monogatari* (2013)

**With**  
Miyazaki Hayao  
Suzuki Toshio  
Takahata Isao  
Anno Hideaki

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

Japanese theatrical title  
**Yume to kyōki no okoku**

A documentary showing life at the Tokyo animation studio Ghibli, famed for its 2001 film 'Spirited Away' by Miyazaki Hayao, now aged 73. Spanning the period from autumn 2012 to summer 2013, we follow the production of his film 'The Wind Rises', which is produced by his long-time colleague Suzuki Toshio. We see them struggling to complete the film. Anno Hideaki, a celebrated animation director who worked for Miyazaki in his youth, is chosen to voice the lead character in 'The Wind Rises'. Takahata Isao, Miyazaki's senior colleague, is working on his own Ghibli film; he briefly comments on their relationship. 'The Wind Rises' is finally released. Soon afterwards, Miyazaki announces his retirement from feature directing.

## Manakamana

USA 2013

Directors: Stephanie Spray, Pacho Velez

doesn't quite hit home, its thunder rather stolen by sundry previous vertiginous aerial shots effectively inscribing the notion of man's almost-microscopic place in the universe.

Overall, an enjoyable if unexceptional memento of true-life dering-do. The UK distributors are making the film available in both the concurrently shot English-language and subtitled versions; the latter offers more natural performances but less visceral immediacy in the crisply handled action highlights. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Jeremy Thomas  
Aage Aaberge

#### Written by

Petter Skavlan  
Based on the life of  
Thor Heyerdahl

#### Director of

#### Photography

Geir Hartly  
Andreassen

#### Edited by

Perry Eriksen  
Martin Stoltz

#### Production Design

Karl Jüllusson

#### Music

Johan Söderqvist

#### Sound Design

Baard Haugan  
Ingebreten  
Tormod Ringnes  
**Costume Designers**  
Stine Gudmundsen-  
Holmgreen  
Louize Nissen

©Nordisk Film  
Production AS

#### Production

#### Companies

Nordisk Film  
Production &  
Recorded Picture  
Company present  
in association with  
Airccontactgruppen,  
DCM Productions  
and Solbakken,

Roenbergfilm,  
Motion Blur, Henrik  
Bergesen, Film 3,  
Film i Väst, Filmlance  
International  
With support from  
Norwegian Film  
Institute, Eurimages,  
Nordic Film and  
TV Fund, Malta  
Film Commission,  
Swedish Film  
Institute, Danish Film  
Institute, Media 2i

Developed with  
the assistance  
of Berg-Hansen  
Reisebureau AS

Developed and  
produced in  
co-operation  
with Neofilm

With the support  
of the MEDIA  
Programme of the  
European Union

Developed with  
the support of the  
UK Film Council

With the support  
of the financial  
incentives provided  
by the Government  
of Malta

#### Executive

#### Producers

Lena Haugaard  
Henrik Zein  
Peter Watson

Johan Chr. Stenersen  
Petter Skavlan  
Dario Suter  
Christoph Daniel  
Marc Schmidheiny  
Lone Korslund  
Harald Zwart

#### Cast

**Pål Hagen**  
Thor Heyerdahl

**Anders Baasmo**

**Christiansen**  
Herman Watzinger

**Tobias Santelmann**  
Knut Haugland

**Gustaf Skarsgård**  
Bengt Danielsson

**Odd-Magnus**  
**Williamson**  
Erik Hesselberg

**Jakob Oftebro**  
Torstein Raaby

**Agnis Kittelsen**  
Liv Heyerdahl

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

Released in UK in  
both Norwegian-  
language version  
with English  
subtitles, and in  
English-language  
version

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures



The cable guys: *Manakamana*

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Though its subject matter doesn't seem particularly fun on the surface, Stephanie Spray and Pacho Velez's *Manakamana* is a sort of structural game, by turns contemplative and, yes, playful. It sets hard and immovable rules in place, then explores what is cinematographically possible within those constraints.

Spray and Velez limit themselves to working with large and unwieldy building blocks, Stonehenge-hefty hunks of footage. Their camera is always held to a fixed position, inside the cable car that transports Hindu pilgrims and tourists to the Manakamana Temple at the top of a Nepalese mountain ridge. Each shot in their film runs as long as a 400ft magazine of 16mm film, which is to say around 11 minutes. This is also, as it happens, the length of time it takes for the cable car to reach its destination: two mechanical apparatuses running in concert, individually going about their repetitive rounds.

The first half of *Manakamana* is devoted to ascents. Sometimes the camera is directed towards the face of the verdant ridge the car is

advancing on, sometimes away from it, so that the valley the car has left is seen rolling away in the background. The foreground is filled by the occupants of the car, who themselves provide the variety – in age, sex, race and the tenor of their emotional responses to the journey – that the self-imposed strictures of the film otherwise forbid. There is an old man with a young boy; two young women speaking English with American accents, one of apparently Nepalese background; a trio of very old Nepalese women in traditional dress, two of whom seem to share the same husband. Some of the passengers carry offerings for the goddess Bhagwati, such as the middle-aged woman with a basket of flowers and the older couple with a rooster. We even ride up with a cargo car containing only four goats, tethered together. We don't see the fate of these goats but we can guess at it – especially when three twentyish long-haired guys in metal-head garb, evidently in a band together, get on with a mewling kitten and one jokes about sacrificing it. When the couple with the rooster reappear at



### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Lucien Castaing-  
Taylor  
Véréna Paravel

#### Camera Operator

Pacho Velez

#### Editing

Stephanie Spray  
Pacho Velez

#### Sound Recordist

Stephanie Spray

©Stephanie Spray  
and Pacho Velez

#### Production

#### Companies

Funding and in-kind  
support: Princess  
Grace Foundation,  
Fulbright-Hays  
DDRA, Social

Sciences Research  
Council-IDRF, The  
Film Study Center and  
Department of Visual  
and Environmental  
Studies at Harvard  
University

Produced at  
the Sensory  
Ethnography Lab

#### In Colour

[1.78:1]

#### Subtitles

#### Distributor

Dogwoof

A documentary consisting of 11 vignettes shot inside the cable car that transports Hindu pilgrims and tourists between the base station in Cheres, Nepal, to the mountaintop Manakamana Temple. Six scenes take place in cars heading up the ridge, five in cars on their way down. Each scene lasts approximately 11 minutes, the full length of a ride in one direction. There is no narration, onscreen text or information aside from what emerges in the course of passengers' conversations. The ascending

parties are: an old man and a child, a middle-aged woman with a basket of flowers, a middle-aged couple with a rooster, a trio of old women, three twentysomething metal-heads, and four sacrificial goats. The descending parties are: a single middle-aged woman, two young women with American accents, two older women (perhaps mother and daughter) eating ice cream, two traditional folk musicians and, reappearing, the couple with the rooster, which is now dead and ready for the pot.

**Fatu Hiva island, South Pacific, 1937.** Thor Heyerdahl, a Norwegian anthropologist studying with his wife Liv, is influenced by native folklore and the presence of indigenous South American plants to intuit that Polynesia was populated from South America rather than Asia.

In 1947 Heyerdahl decides to build a balsa raft using ancient technology and prove the viability of his theory. Instead of returning to his family in Norway, he heads to Peru, accompanied by fridge salesman Herman Watzinger; there they join Norwegians Knut Haugland, Torstein Raaby and Erik Hesselberg and lone Swede Bengt Danielsson. They build the vessel – naming it 'Kon-Tiki' after an Incan god – and take to the South Pacific. Difficulty in steering the raft sends them drifting north at first, but after a dangerous encounter with a whale shark they find themselves catching the south-westerly current towards the Polynesian islands. The crew find their resolve tested as they are battered by storms and attacked by more sharks, with only Heyerdahl trusting in the ancient lore supposedly inspiring their enterprise. After 101 days at sea, they ride the waves to evade the dangerous coral reef off Raroia Island and strike land.

News of Heyerdahl's 5,000-mile odyssey spreads around the world. A letter from Liv informs him that she cannot make a life for herself and her children with such an adventurer. Captions indicate that Heyerdahl's subsequent account of the Kon-Tiki's journey sold some 50 million copies worldwide.



the end of the film's second half, which is all descents, we see its motionless feet poking out from the bottom of the frame.

Some passengers mediate their trip with digital cameras, others are meditative. Those in groups chat among themselves but also, implicitly, address the filmmakers and an unseen audience, using this stage to either speak their minds (the old women) or preen and perform (the metal-heads). Eleven minutes is a long ride, however, and conversation ebbs and flows through the duration. Two traditional musicians, a sort of counterpoint to the metal kids, pass the time tuning and playing their instruments on the way down. Many of the 'performers' evince nervousness—perhaps at being suspended high above the forest floor, perhaps at the camera's presence, for the movie is very much a study in watching the self-consciously watched. Despite the perilous altitude and the occasional shudders of the cable car, the nearest thing to a suspense scene involves a pair of women, presumably mother and daughter, trying to eat runny ice cream before it drips all over their hands. Often the passengers are left alone with their thoughts, and the viewer is alone with them to imagine what those thoughts might be. The couple with the rooster are the only ones to appear twice, and their recurrence, breaking an established rule, makes a fitting point of closure. (Their foreheads are now anointed, and a solemn silence is upon them.)

Spray and Velez made the film under the auspices of Harvard University's Sensory Ethnography Lab. Their film's credited producers are SEL founder Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, the co-directors of 2012's *Leviathan*. That film in part forswore traditional viewfinder control through its use of GoPro cameras, with their ability to go where no cinematographer can, wriggling into tight spots, plunging into the sea or taking flight. Likewise Spray and Velez's approach combines an element of chance (leaving the camera in a set position, to run out by itself) and an element of conscious construction (the selection and arrangement of material).

According to an interview with the filmmakers, *Manakamana* took 18 months at the editing stage—which is a lot of work to go through to achieve the appearance of unmediated happenstance. For some viewers, this may seem like a lot of work for nothing—and they wouldn't be, strictly speaking, incorrect. Remaining in flux throughout, coming or going, the audience never enjoys the payoff the passengers do: the actual Manakamana Temple, the film's structuring absence. But that nothingness is an inviting, liberating space for both viewer and subject to think. Older passengers note changes in the landscape; younger ones the disused mountainside trail that others remember climbing in bygone days. The couple with the rooster discuss the replacement of thatched roofs by slate, slate roofs by tin. *Manakamana* isn't a eulogy for old ways but rather a film of circles within circles, duration within duration, a cable line within a lifeline. Putting us through the passage of 11 minutes repeatedly, it allows us to glimpse something about the passage of years. 📍

## Mea Culpa

France/Belgium 2012  
Director: Fred Cavayé

### Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Effectively one long chase sequence, Fred Cavayé's third feature pares back the flab of plot and characterisation even further than his earlier efforts, resulting in a lean beefcake of a film: 90 muscular minutes of genre with lots of brawn and very little brain.

*Mea Culpa* recycles and refines the successful formula that underpinned *Anything for Her* (2008, remade by Paul Haggis as *The Next Three Days*) and *Point Blank* (2010), as an ordinary man takes the law into his own hands to save his family. The notional plot turns on the efforts of ex-cop Simon (Vincent Lindon) to protect his son Théo (Max Baisette de Malglaive) and estranged wife Alice (Nadine Labaki) after Théo witnesses a gang execution. Adopting a strike-first approach, he teams up with former partner Franck (Gilles Lellouche) to take out the bad guys before they track Théo down. Thus a child in peril provides the emotional hook, a bunch of cartoonish villains and toothless authorities the rationale. Both are but an excuse for a rapid-fire series of admittedly impressive set pieces culminating in a shootout on a speeding TGV.

Cavayé undoubtedly has a gift for action. Along with cinematographer Danny Elsen and art director Philippe Chiffre he makes canny use of the move from Paris—where his previous two films were shot—to the dusty military port of Toulon. The city's pale colonnades and shady interiors combine to create a kind of sun-bleached chiaroscuro (an opening chase set in an around a bullfighting arena is particularly elegant), while at night the mirrored walls of nightclubs and the tarpaulin-covered walls of warehouses shimmer and shift to disorienting effect. Benjamin's Weill's well-judged editing lends momentum, ratcheting up the suspense.

For all its technical aplomb, though, there's something rather anachronistic about *Mea Culpa*. The Eastern European gangsters—shaven-



Point and shoot: Gilles Lellouche, Vincent Lindon

headed and leather-clad, their motives for murder semaphored as simply "girls and heroin"—seem to come straight from a 1980s Bruce Willis film, an effect only heightened by Cliff Martinez's spangly synth soundtrack. The film is also painfully straight-faced, the only levity provided by a pair of jobs-worth ticket inspectors, both of whom are swiftly and gruesomely dispatched.

The stars of *Anything for Her* and *Point Blank* respectively, Lindon and Lellouche are eminently watchable and have an easy rapport—the former lurching through the action like an ageing bull, the latter a charming and energetic foil. An impressionistic series of soft-focus flashbacks to a dark truth about their relationship doesn't really do justice to either actor's ability, but they acquit themselves well enough in the fight sequences. And that, after all, is what *Mea Culpa* is really about. 📍

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Cyril Colbeau-Justin  
Jean-Baptiste Dupont  
Sidonie Dumas  
**Screenplay and Adaptation**  
Fred Cavayé  
Guillaume Lemans  
Based on an idea  
by Olivier Marchal  
**Director of Photography**  
Danny Elsen  
**Editor**  
Benjamin Weill  
**Art Director**  
Philippe Chiffre  
**Music**  
Cliff Martinez  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Pierre Andre  
**Costume Designer**  
Marie-Laure Lasso

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Gaumont, TF1  
Films Production,  
K.R.Productions,  
Bad Company,  
Nexus Factory  
**Production Companies**  
Gaumont present

an LGM Cinéma,  
Gaumont, TF1  
Films Production,  
K.R.Productions,  
Bad Company  
co-production  
in co-production  
with Nexus Factory  
and UMedia  
in association  
with Ufund  
with the participation  
of Canal+, Cine+,  
TF1, 13ème Rue  
with the support of  
the Tax Shelter of the  
Federal Government  
of Belgium and the  
Investors Tax Shelter  
**Executive Producer**  
David Giordano

**Cast**  
Vincent Lindon  
Simon  
Gilles Lellouche  
Franck Vasseur  
Nadine Labaki  
Alice  
Gilles Cohen  
Pastor  
Max Baisette  
de Malglaive

Théo, aged 10  
**Velibor Topic**  
Milan  
**Medi Sadoun**  
Jacques  
**Aurèle Dussart**  
Théo, aged 3  
**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour and**  
**Black and White**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Metrodrome  
Distribution Ltd

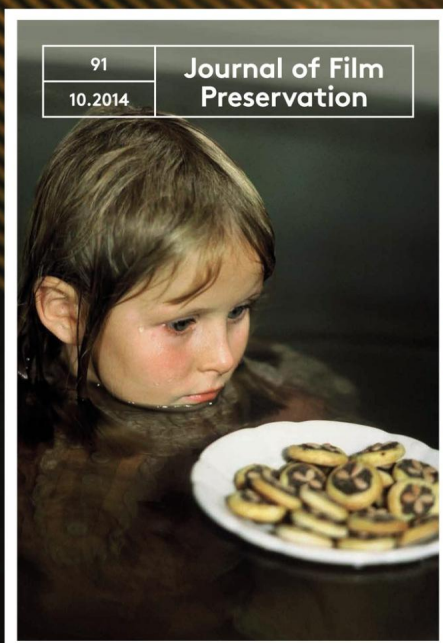
Toulon, France, present day. After causing a fatal accident while drink-driving, police officer Simon was stripped of his badge and sentenced to two years in prison. Now he is separated from his wife Alice and earns a living driving armoured cars, while ex-partner Franck, a widowed single father, still walks the beat.

At a bullfight with Alice, Simon's nine-year-old son Théo stumbles across a murder and runs to the police. Théo is now a key witness in Franck's investigation into a string of assassinations, and as he leaves the station the killers are waiting for him. They chase him to a disused warehouse, but Franck and Simon come to the rescue.

With Franck's help, Simon interrogates one of the injured gang members, who tells him that he works for Eastern European crime boss Milan. Franck and Simon track Milan down to his nightclub, but succeed only in killing Milan's brother. An enraged Milan and his men follow Simon, Alice and Théo on to the train they have boarded to escape Toulon. Franck tries unsuccessfully to stop the train, and then pursues it by car.

A violent confrontation takes place between Simon's family and the thugs, climaxing when the train finally stops and Franck catches up. Simon kills Milan by throwing him on to the tracks, but not before Milan shoots Franck. With his dying breath, Franck confesses that he was the driver of the car that crashed six years ago. Alice and Simon reunite.

# Journal of Film Preservation



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# Me, Myself and Mum

France/Belgium 2013

Director: Guillaume Gallienne

## Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

One of France's critical and box-office hits of 2013-14, Guillaume Gallienne's first film as director derives from his highly successful 2008 autobiographical one-man show. On stage he played all the parts in the story of his quest for sexual identity; in the film he 'only' plays himself and his mother. As hinted at by the show's title, also retained for the film in French (*Les Garçons et Guillaume, à table!* – 'Boys and Guillaume, come and eat!'), *Me, Myself and Mum* is about Guillaume's difference from other boys, but it is, unusually, told as a tale of heterosexual coming-out.

Guillaume is one of three sons of a wealthy bourgeois family in Paris. He adores his mother, whose voice and mannerisms he imitates, while his father (André Marcon) and his two brothers (Renaud Cestre and Pierre Derenne) despise him as a sissy. He finds added feminine support from his aunts and especially his grandmother (a delightful cameo from veteran actress Françoise Fabian). The film charts his efforts, first to fit in with what he thinks he is – a girl, later a homosexual man – and then to free himself of his hang-ups and achieve his 'true' identity: after many mishaps and consultations with psychiatrists, he falls in love with Amandine (Clémence Thioly) and decides to marry her, to his mother's surprise and in fact disappointment.

The brilliance of *Me, Myself and Mum* first comes from Gallienne's ability to retain the theatricality of his tale without doing 'filmed theatre'. The movie opens with him in his dressing room applying makeup, then walking on stage to begin his narration, at which point the story seamlessly moves into the cinematic. The link to the stage is retained throughout as a connecting thread in a number of forms: the use of voiceover, rapid cutting in and out of the stage and, funniest of all, the mother appearing impromptu, usually smoking, to deliver her opinion in scenes where she is invisible to other characters. As a further twist, Gallienne's 'real' mother appears in the theatre audience (though she, in turn, is played by an actress, Françoise Lépine). As he would on stage, Gallienne at various points addresses the spectator directly, moving in and out of the fiction.

In a film so based on performance, and with Gallienne's assumption of two roles, much rests on the actor's shoulders. Luckily they are broad. As a comic actor, Gallienne belongs to a rare breed, spanning the spectrum from high to popular culture. A member of the Comédie-Française who has played theatre classics from Shakespeare and Racine to Feydeau, he is also famous for his comic sketches on French television, one of his funniest characters being a middle-aged casting agent called Gabrielle, who is not a million miles from his mother in the film. Gallienne's chameleon-like ability and talent for voice modulation have led to many voiceover roles and audiobooks, and he has impersonated characters as different as Jolitorax in *Asterix and Obelix: God Save Britannia* (2012) and Pierre Bergé in Jilil Lespert's *Yves Saint Laurent* (2014).


As applied to the portrayal of his mother, Gallienne's performance encompasses both comic excess and subtle, affectionate irony. This



Mother of invention: Diane Kruger, Guillaume Gallienne

allows *Me, Myself and Mum* to rise above childish farce to offer an idiosyncratic take on issues of identity. True to form, Gallienne acts his way to a realisation of who he 'really is' through a series of comic sketches. Some are extremely funny, such as his impersonation of 'Sissi' (Elisabeth, Empress of Austria, as embodied by Romy Schneider in the cult 1955 film), his tongue-in-cheek take on the English boarding school or his interview with a doctor when trying, successfully, to avoid military service. There is borderline vulgarity in a German spa, and the two scenes devoted to his attempts at homosexual sex ignore political correctness in a very French manner. This does not, however, make the resolution,

in which Guillaume emerges as heterosexual, necessarily normative: he maintains a slightly camp performance style throughout, and his world still revolves around women.

*Me, Myself and Mum* is de facto a self-centred film that could easily be accused of navel-gazing. However, its 2.8 million viewers in France, together with a huge number of nominations and awards (including five Césars at the 2014 ceremony) illustrate Gallienne's ability to touch a wide audience. *Me, Myself and Mum* was born of performance and in many ways is about performance, but it also goes straight to the heart of the most intimate and sensitive issues of family relationships and sexual identity. 

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Edouard Weil  
Cyril Colbeau-Justin  
Jean-Baptiste Dupont  
**Screenplay**  
Guillaume Gallienne  
With the artistic  
collaboration of  
Claude Mathieu  
Nicolas Vassiliou  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Glynn Speckhaert  
**Editor**  
Valérie Deseine  
**Art Director**  
Sylvie Olivé  
**Original Music**  
**Composed and  
Conducted by**  
Marie-Jeanne Séréro  
**Sound Recordist**  
Marc-Antoine Beldent  
**Costume Designer**  
Olivier Beriot

©LGM Films,  
Rectangle  
Productions, Don't  
Be Shy Productions,  
Gaumont, France  
3 Cinéma, Nexus  
Factory, uFilm

**Production  
Companies**  
Gaumont presents an  
LGM Films, Rectangle  
Productions, Don't  
Be Shy Productions,  
Gaumont,  
France 3 Cinéma  
co-production  
In co-production  
with Nexus Factory  
and uFilm  
In association with  
uFund, Banque  
Postale Image 6  
and Cinéma 7  
With the participation  
of Ciné+, Ciné+,  
France Télévisions  
With the support  
of Tax Shelter du  
Gouvernement  
Fédéral de Belgique,  
CNC (Nouvelles  
technologies en  
production)

**Cast**  
Guillaume Gallienne  
Guillaume/Mum  
André Marcon  
Dad

Françoise Fabian  
Babou  
Nanou Garcia  
Paqui  
Diane Kruger  
Ingeborg  
Reda Kateb  
Karim  
Götz Otto  
Raymond  
Charlie Anson  
Jeremy  
Renaud Cestre  
Pierre Derenne  
brothers  
Clémence Thioly  
Amandine  
Françoise Lépine  
Mum in theatre/  
replica Mum

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Cinefile

French theatrical title  
*Les Garçons et  
Guillaume, à table!*

The film begins as a theatre show, with Guillaume taking to the stage to narrate the story of his quest for his sexual identity. The action then moves to present-day Paris, Spain and England.

Guillaume is an adolescent from a wealthy Parisian family who is widely considered to be effeminate. He idolises his mother, who treats him like a girl, while his father disapproves of him; his brothers mock him for not being macho enough. Guillaume asks to go to Spain to learn Spanish, but once there he learns to dance the 'sevillana' (taking the girl's part). He is sent to boarding school in France, which he hates, and then in England, which he enjoys, except for the sports. He is attracted to a schoolmate, Jeremy, but the latter prefers girls.

A crisis is triggered when Guillaume's mother suggests that he is homosexual. He is sent to a spa in Germany and successfully engineers a way out of military service. Two attempts at gay sex end with him fleeing in panic. He consults psychiatrists, one of whom suggests that he needs to conquer his fear of horses, which he does. To his own surprise, Guillaume falls in love with a young woman, Amandine. When he tells his mother he wants to marry Amandine, her displeasure makes him realise that she was the one who encouraged him to behave like a girl.

## Men, Women & Children

USA 2014

Director: Jason Reitman

Certificate 15 119m 33s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

By now, any veteran moviegoer should see the words 'Directed by Jason Reitman' and read them as 'RUUUUNNN!' – but *Men, Women & Children* is a special case. This is a film in which average folks who desire fame are condescended to by the son of the director of *Ghostbusters*, who has received it as his birthright. It is a film so determined to say something about American Life Today and so completely unfamiliar with its ostensible subject that even Alan Ball might find it strains credibility. The film's title, as it happens, also describes the groups of people who shouldn't see it under any circumstances.

*Men, Women & Children* is Reitman's We Need to Talk About the Internet movie, in which he reveals the citizens of Anytown, Texas, living lives of horny desperation, lost in a miasma of pop-up text boxes (which incessantly appear on screen) when not desultorily eating waffle fries alone at the mall food court. Reitman co-wrote the screenplay with fellow vocational 'indie' type Erin Cressida Wilson from a novel by Chad Kultgen, and they have together made a work that reduces its dramatis personae to the sum total of their sexual peccadilloes, devoted to catching everyone with their pants quite literally down.

Nobody gets it worse here than Chris Truby (Travis Tope), 15-year-old son of Don and Rachel (Adam Sandler and Rosemarie DeWitt), who discovers, via internet pornography, that he likes to be sexually dominated. Never mind that such fetishes predate the motion picture, let alone the World Wide Web – *Men, Women & Children* gives it to be understood in no uncertain terms that Chris, who fails to get it up for awkward sex with cheerleader and aspiring model Hannah (Olivia Crocicchia), is a victim of desensitisation. (His bored parents, more old-fashioned, settle for using the internet to set up IRL assignations.) I doubt very much that a teenager discovering his homosexuality, for example, would be given anything like the same treatment, but Reitman and co are careful to aim their sham pity towards a less well-understood species of desire. Per Emma Thompson's deadpan



Screening process: Rosemarie DeWitt

voiceover, which provides a wry commentary to the onscreen action in a seeming imitation of Siri or some kind of text-to-speech program, Chris has been prematurely exposed to "a level of deviance well outside societal norms" – norms the movie tacitly reinforces at every turn.

There is no point in trying to designate a best performance in this hash, though Jennifer Garner is a strong candidate for worst, playing an overprotective mother who vigilantly monitors her daughter's internet and cell-phone use. Her smug delivery of such lines as "I wanna give you a pamphlet about the dangers of selfies" is meant to insure the movie against charges of technophobia, but her chiding dialogue is essentially that of *Men, Women & Children*. Aside from the distancing authorial voiceover, the film shifts occasionally and finally to a literally cosmic view – that of the Voyager spacecraft launched in 1977, carrying a freight of information about human culture to be discovered by extraterrestrials. This suggests a very good idea for the 'archiving' of Reitman's film, which ought to be aimed towards another offending galaxy and unloaded at the earliest available opportunity. ⚡

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Jason Reitman  
Helen Estabrook

#### Screenplay

Jason Reitman  
Erin Cressida Wilson  
Based on the novel  
by Chad Kultgen

#### Director of

#### Photography

Eric Steelberg

#### Edited by

Dana E. Glauber

#### Production Designer

Bruce Curtis

#### Music

Bibio

#### Sound Mixer

Ethan Andrus

#### Costume Designer

Leah Katznelson

©Paramount Pictures

Corporation and

Chocolate Milk

Pictures LLC

#### Production

Companies

Paramount Pictures

and Chocolate

Milk Pictures

present a Right of

Way production

A Jason Reitman film

#### Executive Producers

Michael Beugg

Mason Novick

#### Cast

Rosemarie DeWitt

Helen Truby

Jennifer Garner

Patricia Beltmeyer

Judy Greer

Donna Clint

Dean Norris

Kent Mooney

Adam Sandler

Don Truby

Emma Thompson

narrator

Dennis Haysbert

'Secretluvr'

J.K. Simmons

Allison's dad

#### Timothée Chalamet

Danny Vance

Olivia Crocicchia

Hannah Clint

Kaitlyn Dever

Brandy Beltmeyer

Ansel Elgort

Tim Mooney

Katherine Hughes

Brooke Benton

Elena Kampouris

Allison Doss

Will Peltz

Brandon Lender

Travis Tope

Chris Truby

Dolby Digital/

Datasat

In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Distributor

Paramount

Pictures UK

Texas, present day. Tim Mooney, star player of his high-school football squad, quits the team after being abandoned by his mother. He begins a tentative friendship with Brandy Beltmeyer, a classmate who has very few social outlets because her mother Patricia vigilantly monitors her internet and cell-phone use. Don Truby is not so strict with his son Chris, however, and regularly masturbates to the pornography that he discovers on his son's computer. While Don and his wife Rachel both secretly pursue sexual satisfaction outside their marriage, Chris begins to see Hannah Clint, a cheerleader who dreams of becoming a star. Hannah's mother Joan manages her daughter's website and takes risqué pictures of her for subscribers; this material fails to arouse Chris, who favours porn scenarios involving sexual domination. The discovery of Hannah's suggestive photographs leads to her being disqualified from a reality programme talent search. Patricia callously breaks up Tim and Brandy's burgeoning relationship, leading him to attempt suicide, after which she sees the error of her ways. Don discovers his wife's infidelities and reveals his own to her; they decide to continue their life together without further discussion.

## Merchants of Doubt

Director: Robert Kenner

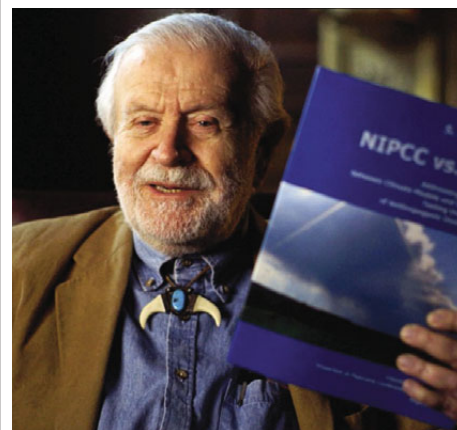
### Reviewed by Jordan Cronk

We're reminded early on in *Merchants of Doubt* that the 'con' in the term con man stands for 'confidence'. This obvious yet emblematic bit of information is relayed by Jamy Ian Swiss, a professional magician who acts for the duration of the film as our thematic tour guide. This confidence, he informs us, is the key component in the audience-performer relationship, instilling as it does an assurance in the spectator – which the performer will soon put to the test. Confidence is thus essential to the success of any good hustler, magician or, in the case of the myriad historical and contemporary examples outlined here, publicity-minded media mouthpieces who have spun facts and blurred lines of lawful dissemination for decades.

*Merchants of Doubt*, director Robert Kenner's follow-up to his well-received corporate culinary indictment *Food Inc.* (2008), parlays a similar interest in ethically dubious production and promotional codes into a brief survey of American lobbyist traditions and agendas. An unabashedly populist documentarian, Kenner is, to all intents and purposes, as interested in entertaining as informing, and he is clearly of the view that each approach can (and should) bolster the other. Hence the slightly elementary framing device equating representatives of the 'doubt industry' with sleight-of-hand magicians, and a host of experts and historians utilised as talking-head narrators, delivering thoughts and anecdotes on the precedence and principles that have led to contemporary modes of media manipulation.

The film is elevated, however, by the urgency and importance of its greater concern, which turns out to be less the finer points of propaganda than the issues these spin doctors shroud in misinformation. Kenner attempts to place current political and sociological matters, particularly global warming, within a continuum of past controversies ranging from the sinister promotion of Big Tobacco to the ignorance regarding the harmful chemical response of flame retardants and the ramifications of the greenhouse effect. Each of these topics is outlined in individual segments, featuring a handful of personalities associated with the history of its misrepresentation, highlighting both the topical familiarity of such conflicts and the humour of their retroactive transparency.

The intertwining of archival footage,



Climate of opinion: Fred Singer



illustrative animations and contemporary interviews lends the first half of the film a swift, agreeable energy, Kenner playing it as a kind satirical comment on the inherent absurdity of such illogical public posturing. As we watch tobacco lobbyists testify against – and flat out lie about – the cancerous consequences of cigarettes, as well as climate-change experts who directly contradict natural phenomena, it's clear that profile and publicity have traditionally wielded far greater influence on popular perception than statistics or even the physical fallout from these practices.

Historical antecedents established, *Merchants of Doubt* continues towards the present-day global-warming crisis, our most pressing cultural concern and one whose tangible effects Kenner really shouldn't have to reiterate – except that debate rages and doubt still lingers in the mind of much of the populace. The opinions of physicists such as Fred Singer and Fred Seitz, while problematic, come from established names in the field of science. Bought and paid-for 'climate-change consultants' such as Marc Morano, however, complicate matters, presenting themselves to the public as specialists when in fact they have no scientific experience. That Kenner eventually contrasts these representatives with someone like former South Carolina Congressman Bob Inglis, who changed his stance on global warming after researching and grappling with the subject, only highlights the ethical disparity between such roles and the grip that corporate America still maintains on journalists and politicians alike. The film concludes with an onscreen message – "Don't let them stack the deck" – encouraging a more proactive role on the part of the viewer. Like the majority of the information outlined *Merchants of Doubt*, it's presented thoughtfully if conspicuously, an earnest plea in the face of such widespread duplicity. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**  
Robert Kenner  
Melissa Robledo  
**Written by**  
Robert Kenner  
Kim Roberts  
Inspired by the book  
by Naomi Oreskes,  
Erik Conway  
**Directors of  
Photography**  
Don Lenzler  
Barry Berona  
Jay Redmond  
**Editor**  
Kim Roberts  
**Music**  
Mark Adler  
**Sound**

Eddie O'Connor  
Taki Oldham  
Aaron Webster

**Production  
Companies**  
A Sony Pictures  
Classics release  
and presentation  
in association  
with Participant  
Media and Omidyar  
Network  
**Executive  
Producers**  
Jeff Skoll  
Pierre Omidyar  
Diane Weyermann

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures  
Releasing UK

A documentary examining how American lobbyists and public relations representatives have obscured the truth on major issues. Many of history's instances of media manipulation are outlined, from the Big Tobacco trials of the 1950s to debates regarding global warming. Mixing archival footage and contemporary interviews with both self-proclaimed experts and specialists, authors and historians, the film builds a case for a more proactive stance on who and what we allow to influence our political perceptions.

## Nativity 3 Dude, Where's My Donkey?!

United Kingdom 2014, Director: Debbie Isitt  
Certificate U 109m 32s

### Reviewed by Anna Smith

The plot device of amnesia can be used to good effect, but in this third in the family-friendly *Nativity* series it recalls the desperation of an ailing soap opera. After a knock on the head at St Bernadette's primary school, Mr Shepherd (Martin Clunes) cannot recall his fiancée or his daughter, and his memory must return for harmony to be restored to his new family unit, the latter being a common theme of the series. Another common theme is adults rediscovering the simple joys of childhood, and so Mr Shepherd – forgetting he was a stiff suit – starts dressing in colourful sports clothes and bounds around like an excited puppy, as does teaching assistant Mr Poppy.

As naive man-child Poppy, Marc Wootton brings most of the film's laughs, but these are not enough to distract from the wildly implausible plot, dubious moral implications, amateurish musical numbers and British actors and locations blatantly attempting to pass for US ones. Ⓢ



Pique midwinter: Martin Clunes, Marc Wootton

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Nick Jones  
**Written by**  
Debbie Isitt  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Sean Van Hales  
**Editor**  
Nicky Ager  
**Production  
Designer**  
Tim Stevenson  
**Original Songs  
and Music**  
Nicky Ager  
Debbie Isitt  
**Production  
Sound Mixer**  
John Taylor  
**Costume Designer**  
Andrew Cox

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(N3) Limited/  
Entertainment  
One UK Limited  
**Production  
Companies**  
Entertainment One  
presents a Mirrorball  
Films production  
A Debbie Isitt film  
**Executive  
Producers**  
Laurence Brown  
Alex Hamilton  
Daniel Toland

**Cast**  
Martin Clunes  
Mr Shepherd  
Marc Wootton  
Mr Poppy

**Catherine Tate**  
Sophie  
**Adam Garcia**  
Bradley Finch  
**Ralf Little**  
Sophie's brother  
**Lauren Hobbs**  
Lauren  
**Jason Watkins**  
Gordon Shakespeare  
**Celia Imrie**  
Mrs Keen

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
E1 Films

Coventry, the present. St Bernadette's primary school is awaiting the arrival of an Ofsted inspector and a 'super-teacher'. Mr Shepherd arrives and is assumed to be the super-teacher. Teaching assistant Mr Poppy is rehearsing the nativity play with a donkey, which kicks Mr Shepherd in the head. Afterwards, Mr Shepherd can remember neither his daughter Lauren nor his fiancée Sophie, who is preparing for their wedding in New York. Poppy vows to help Mr Shepherd win a flashmob competition, the prize being a trip to New York, which may jog his memory. When they fail to win, Poppy steals the winners' passports and tickets for himself, Shepherd and the children. Sophie is confused by her fiancée's behaviour and prepares to marry her ex, Bradley. Shepherd – who is in fact the Ofsted inspector – finally remembers everything and he and Sophie are married. Everyone dances on top of the Empire State Building.

## Northern Soul

United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Elaine Constantine  
Certificate 15 101m 50s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

The characters in photographer Elaine Constantine's first feature are so narrowly focused on music that, aside from the inevitable link between the Northern Soul scene and specific fashions – high-waisted flared trousers, homemade tattoos – other popular culture passes them by. Which means that John (Elliot James Langridge) doesn't go to the pictures, so he misses out on the origins of the genre he inhabits by not catching Claude Whatham's *That'll Be the Day* (1973) – which beat George Lucas's *American Graffiti* to UK cinemas by a few months and remains the template for the mix of teenage rebellion, nostalgic tie-in soundtrack and historical recreation that *Northern Soul* sticks to very closely.

"I don't know if you've noticed," says guru-like DJ Ray Henderson (James Lance), trying to get John to ditch his loose-cannon best friend Matt, "but this is Northern Soul not northern arsehole." Besides the music and displays of disco dancing (and proto-breakdance floor-spinning) that owe as much to the fight stylings of Bruce Lee (a one-time cha-cha champion) as the strutting of the *Soul Train* generation, the heart of the film is the relationship between more-or-less reasonable John and out-of-control Matt (Josh Whitehouse), which seems like a milky-tea echo of the Charlie and Johnny friendship of *Mean Streets* (1973).

*Northern Soul* isn't as explicitly gay as Isaac Julien's 1977-set *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), but housemates John and Matt have a lot of shirtless embraces, blazing rows and reconciliations. John gets an outside romance with Antonia Thomas's interesting if undercharacterised nurse; when he shyly admits that he doesn't know any other black people like her, she tells him that she doesn't either, since she's been marooned in a mostly white county by an American father. The laddish, aggressive, pill-popping Matt, meanwhile, is seemingly celibate, though he is instantly jealous when John becomes friendly with Sean (Jack Gordon), a cockney who is even more committed to Northern Soul than the locals and similarly doesn't have women in his life.

Early on, the film plays up John's teenage anger, both at his meek parents for letting a beloved grandfather (Ricky Tomlinson) die in a tyrannical old folks' home, and at an education system in which he is patronised by an uncaring teacher (Steve Coogan). A historical element that might prove baffling to contemporary audiences is that the hero can storm out of his CSE exams, instantly land a job in a biscuit factory and earn enough to support himself – grim and grinding at the time, this was a period of available jobs for the young unqualified. Sean bursts into the film – amusingly paranoid that every drug buyer is a possible undercover policeman, but ultimately proved correct in his worries – and crashes out, adding a variant accent and shaking up the scene. There's even a nostalgia here for non-lethal drug habits, though Sean cautions against injecting amphetamines rather than swallowing pills.

*That'll Be the Day* (loosely based on the teenage years of John Lennon) and *American Graffiti* end with their lead characters moving out of the bubble of their subculture, fated to become either a pop star (as shown in *That'll Be the Day*'s sequel,





## Open Bethlehem

United Kingdom/United Arab Emirates 2014  
Director: Leila Sansour

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

The story of Leila Sansour's 'Open Bethlehem' project is one of action in response to combined and sometimes competing impulses: an emotional reaction to seeing the geography and landscape of her hometown altered beyond recognition; an urgent humanitarian desire to act on behalf of its increasingly beleaguered Palestinian population; and a determined curiosity as to whether a commercial, touristic approach might offer the sustainable future for Palestine that endless appeals for aid cannot.

Sansour initially conceives of Open Bethlehem – a scheme whereby travellers and persons of international influence are given honorary Bethlehem 'passports', to encourage the symbolic reclamation of the city as an accessible destination in the face of its religious, political and physical division – as a process of mild subterfuge: the visitor is drawn in by the city's mythical trappings, only to come face-to-face with its grim daily reality. This sleight of hand also helps Sansour to secure funding: aid money for Palestine cannot be used for directly political purposes. Inspired, however, by the words of Thomas Cook, arranger of the first package tour to Bethlehem – "To travel is to dispel the mists of fable, and to clear the mind of prejudice" – she soon decides to confront her tour participants with the real, bullet-riddled Bethlehem right off the bat.


Is this approach compatible with a commercial venture that plays on Christmas-carol sentiments? Sansour's funders evidently think not, and begin to melt away; meanwhile, Israel persists with the construction of a wall that cuts through private land, separates individuals from their workplaces and families and businesses from their clients, and seals off ancient shrines for Israeli-only access. What, in this context, is the worth of a PR project? And even if it has worth, how can it be financially and practically sustained for long enough to make an impact?

If the direction of Sansour's project is a little muddled, so too is the focus of her film. The blend of historiography, contemporary politics and



Reality checkpoint: Leila Sansour

personal journey is sometimes awkward; and because the director is invested in her personal struggle to bring the project to fruition, significant developments and sticking points can find themselves subsumed into montage sequences that chiefly emphasise how busy and demanding it all is. It's distinctly frustrating, for instance, when Sansour cuts abruptly from footage of a conversation with a group of American Jews about her admirable refusal to demonise Israel to shots of her engaged in jam-making and a voiceover about how she has "no time to think". Since the film up to this point *has* rather demonised Israel, or at least has been squarely critical of its government's settlement project, how this particular exchange progressed would have been a valuable addition to the narrative.

Still, Sansour makes a likeably frank, emotional and ambitious protagonist; and any tangledness in her tale may be regarded as an honest portrayal of the ethical, financial and personal confusion that can result when one tries to put into practice, for real, the persistent liberal exhortation to *do something* in the face of perceived injustice. 

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Leila Sansour  
**Written by**  
Leila Sansour  
**Camera**  
Katie Barlow  
William Lorimer  
Tone Anderson  
Alan James

Nicholas Wise  
Nidal Al Atrash  
Caroline Carpenter  
Hanna Abu Saada  
**Edited by**  
Marianne Kuopanportti  
Nidal Al Atrash  
**Music**

Florencia Di Concilio  
**Sound Recordists**  
Hanna Abu Saada  
Issam Rishmawi  
  
@Planet Bethlehem  
**Production Companies**  
Planet Bethlehem

presents with support from Tipping Point Film Fund a film by Leila Sansour A Planet Bethlehem film produced with support from Tipping Point Film Fund Co-produced by Dubai

Entertainment and Media Organization in association with Dubai International Film Festival, Dubai Film Market

**In Colour**  
[178:1]

**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Munro Film Services

In 2005, Russian/Palestinian filmmaker Leila Sansour returns to Bethlehem, her home for much of her childhood and the birthplace of her father, who founded the city's university. During her absence, Bethlehem's strategic significance for the Israeli government has increased, as has the pressure on its Palestinian population. A wall is being built to keep Palestinians out of areas that the Israeli government has designated for Israeli settlers only; this has the added effect of separating Palestinian communities from sacred sites. Struck by the potential of Bethlehem to be an emblem for people of multiple faiths, Sansour conceives of a promotional campaign that will counter the Israeli

dominance of tourism to Bethlehem and bring the division of the city to international attention. The 'Open Bethlehem' project encourages visitors to see the real city, and offers them a symbolic passport for citizenship of "the most famous small town in the world". Sansour and her colleagues raise significant funds and attract international press attention and support, including endorsement from the Archbishop of Canterbury. However, donations run out fast. With the Israeli army continuing to round up activists and seize Palestinian lands, the last of Sansour's family leaves Bethlehem. With her English husband back in Britain, Sansour questions the future of her project. She decides to stay and continue her work.


## Ouija

USA/Japan 2014  
Director: Stiles White  
Certificate 15 89m 24s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Having launched franchises based on Transformers and GI Joe toys and attempted to do the same for Battleship, Hasbro here tries to monetise the Ouija board. The plaything has an evil reputation in films from *The Exorcist* (1973) to *Witchboard* (1986) but is nevertheless trademarked and, as noted in the dialogue, sold in toy stores.

Inevitably, this debut feature from Stiles White – screenwriter of *Boogeyman*, *Knowing* and *The Possession* – delivers an awful warning from the mouth of an occult-savvy Hispanic maid (a convenient genre fixture since *Paranormal Activity*) against playing with Ouija boards, then has characters compelled to ignore this sound advice and get haunted to death.

Entirely competent if deeply average, *Ouija* is at least well acted. Olivia Cooke of *The Quiet Ones* and *Bates Motel* makes an appealing, sensitive, determined heroine and Ana Coto is interestingly sulky as the younger sister finally let into the gang after the lead's best friend dies. The film tries for a mystery about which of the ghosts is wicked (a device that dates back to 1944's *The Uninvited*) but mostly delivers formula shocks and apparitions. 

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Michael Bay  
Andrew Form  
Brad Fuller  
Jason Blum  
Bennett Schneir  
**Written by**  
Juliet Snowden  
Stiles White  
**Director of Photography**  
David Emmerichs  
**Edited by**  
Ken Blackwell  
**Production Design**  
Barry Robison  
**Music**  
Anton Sanko  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Zsolt Magyar  
**Costume Design**  
Mary Jane Fort

Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./Fuji Television Network, Inc.  
**Executive Producers**  
Juliet Snowden  
Couper Samuelson  
Jeanette Volturmo-Brill  
Brian Goldner  
Stephen Davis

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures International UK & Ireland

**Cast**  
Olivia Cooke  
Laine Morris  
Daren Kagasoff  
Trevor Douglas Smith  
Pete Bianca Santos  
Isabelle Shelley Hennig  
Debbie Galardi  
Ana Coto  
Sarah Morris  
Lin Shaye  
Paulina Zander  
  
**Dolby Digital/Datasat**

US, present day. Teenager Laine is convinced that her recently deceased friend Debbie did not commit suicide. She gathers her sister Sarah, friend Isabelle, boyfriend Trevor and Debbie's boyfriend Pete in Debbie's house to contact Debbie using an old Ouija board. Instead, they get in touch with Doris, a little girl who was murdered in the house by her mother, a medium. The friends are persecuted and Isabelle is killed. Laine finds Doris's sister Paulina, who was convicted of murdering their mother. Following Paulina's instructions, Laine finds Doris's corpse in a hidden room and cuts the threads sewing her mouth shut to free her spirit. Doris dispels her mother's ghost but reveals herself to be the evil spirit and kills Trevor and Pete. Laine, aided by Debbie's ghost, fights off Doris and banishes her.

## Redirected

Lithuania/United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Emilis Velyvis  
Certificate 18 99m 17s

### Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

"Litha-fuckin-what?" barks an incredulous Vinnie Jones before hopping on a plane and bludgeoning his way through Vilnius's criminal underworld in search of the small-time crooks who've made off with his loot. Baltic setting aside, the third film by Emilis Velyvis (after *Zero. Lilac Lithuania* and *Zero 2*) to top the box office in his homeland (and his first in the English language) is dreadfully familiar stuff. Fists flail and four-letter words fly as freely as bullets among the pea-brained rapid-fire banter and hard-nut posturing that have become clichéd shorthand for criminal camaraderie in the interminable stream of *Lock, Stock* throwbacks (a London pub named 'The Big Tits' is emblematic of the level of wit here).

At least cameraman Feliksas Abrukauskas lends a cinematic polish that raises the film above its recent British counterparts, such as Julian Gilbey's woeful *Plastic* (2014). But it's faint praise for a forgettable film. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Asta Liukaityte  
Daiva Jovaisiene  
Donatas  
Simukauskas  
Norbertas Pranckus

#### Script Writer

Jonas Banyas  
Emilis Velyvis

#### Director of

Photography

Feliksas

Abrukauskas

#### Editors

Emilis Velyvis  
Gintare Sokelyte

#### Production

Designers

Paulius Seskas  
Neringa Baciuskaite

#### Music

Paulius Kilbauskas  
Domas Strupinskas

#### Sound Designer

Arturas

Pugaciauskas

#### Costume Designer

Vitalis Cepkauskas

#### Stunt Co-ordinator

Saulius Janavicius

@Kino Kultas

#### Production

Companies

Content, Cinema

Cult Distribution

and Kino Kultas

in association

with Lithuanian

Film Centre

General Sponsor

Vytautas

#### Executive

Producers

Jacqueline Quella

David Boaretto

#### Cast

Vinnie Jones

Golden Pole

Scot Williams

Michael

Gil Darnell

Johnny

Oliver Jackson

Tim

Anthony Strachan

Ben

Artur Smolyaninov

Doncius

Andrius Ziurauskas

Staska

Vytautas

Sapranaukas

Algis, the priest

Mindaugas

Papinis

Vova

Monika Vaiciulyte

Simona

Karina Stungyte

Ruta

Rafailas Karpis

Antanas

Vita Siaucunaite

Saule

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Part-subtitled

Distributor

Koch Media

## School of Babel

France 2013  
Director: Julie Bertuccelli




Brave new words: *School of Babel*

See Rushes  
on page 10

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Unsentimental, respectful and as pertinent as can be, Julie Bertuccelli's school-set documentary focuses not on the political or economic costs

and benefits of immigration but on the impact on adolescent children of rapid adjustment to a new culture and a new language. The youngsters in the reception class taught by Brigitte Cervoni

hail from dramatically diverse locales and contrasting social circumstances. Among the reasons their parents have brought them to Paris are persecution by neo-Nazis in Serbia; the conflict in Libya; the economic crash in Ireland; the chance of a better education; the opportunity to obtain, as a girl, any education at all; and, in one case, simply "a love affair". This intriguing mix leads to some friction, as well as to the obvious communication difficulties. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Yael Fogiel

Laetitia Gonzalez

#### Photography

Julie Bertuccelli

#### Editor

Josiane Zardoya

#### Music

Olivier Daviaud

#### Sound

Stephan Bauer

Benjamin Bober

Graciela Barrault

Grég Le Maître

Frédéric Dabo

@Les Films du

Poisson, Sampek

Productions, Arte

France Cinéma

#### Production

Companies

Les Films du

Poisson present

in co-production

with Sampek

Productions and

Arte France Cinéma

with the participation

of Arte France, Centre

National du Cinéma

et de L'Image Animée

#### Executive Producer

Johan Broutin

#### In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Subtitles

Distributor

New Wave Films

French theatrical title

La Cour de Babel

Friends and novice criminals John, Ben, Tim and Michael mastermind a plan to raid an illicit London gambling joint and make off to Malaysia with the cash. Michael panics during the robbery but is subdued by Tim with a fire extinguisher. They manage to board their plane but a freak Icelandic volcano eruption redirects their flight to Lithuania, where they disperse. A stunned Michael comes round in a hotel room, without his friends but with the money. After a night on the town, Ben and Tim wake up in a rural farmstead where they lock horns with a group of local black marketeers. John finds himself alone, naked and chained to a radiator, but manages to escape with the help of a prostitute. Meanwhile the four gangsters who operate the London casino are in hot pursuit. All the Londoners catch up with each other at a wedding in the village where Ben and Tim are holed up. A mass fight breaks out and the small-time crooks flee into the countryside, where they are stopped at the Russian border by a soldier in a tank.

A documentary about La Grange aux Belles high school in northern Paris, which offers a reception class to children of recent immigrants, aiding them in speedy language learning. Pupils from places as diverse as Senegal, Ireland, Libya, Venezuela, China and Ukraine, all aged between 11 and 15, form the class taught by Brigitte Cervoni – her final teaching intake before leaving the school to become an inspector for the education ministry.

During classes, the children discuss in their developing French their backgrounds, their ambitions and the challenges of assimilating into French society, as well as issues such as religion. They incorporate some of this into a documentary film, which Cervoni enters into youth film festivals in Paris and Chartres. The bright and articulate Maryam has to leave the school when her family, asylum-seekers from Libya, are assigned a flat elsewhere; Cervoni emphasises to the social worker the need for Maryam's language education to be sustained. In the context of parents' meetings, more

is revealed about the children's backgrounds. Rama, from Senegal, was mistreated there by her father's family, and didn't see her mother for 13 years; they are now reunited, but Rama has behavioural issues. Djenabou, from Guinea, faces genital mutilation and forced marriage if she returns. Xin, from China, sees little of her mother due to the long hours the latter works in a restaurant. Serbian Mihajlo is falling behind because he spends so much time translating asylum information for his non-French-speaking parents; the mother of Luca, from Ireland, explains that he has the additional educational challenge of Asperger syndrome.

The children go on a trip to the prize-giving at the festival in Chartres; their film wins second prize; they also hear that it has taken a jury prize at the Paris festival. The children sit their end-of-year exam. Some move up to the next school year, while others are held back for another year of preparatory study. Rama is held back and takes it badly, but Cervoni consoles her. She says an emotional farewell to her class.



Early on, when the kids are asked simply to translate “hello” into their native tongue, it becomes clear that few uses of language can be separated from their cultural baggage. Rama, from Senegal, writes “salam alaikum”, used as a greeting in Wolof; but to Egyptian-Libyan Maryam, those words should be used only between Muslims, and so cannot be considered a direct translation of “hello”. Elsewhere, naive teenage ponderings about the meaning of existence throw up both awkward humour (one kid proffers the possibility, apparently gleaned from TV, that Chinese people are shapeshifting reptilians from outer space; Xin, the Chinese member of the class, doesn’t respond, perhaps because of her still-limited understanding of English) and endearing profundities (the name of our home planet, suggests Djenabou from Guinea, should really be changed to ‘Question’, uncertainty and disagreement being its dominant modes).

Seeing the children struggle to express such ideas in an unfamiliar tongue is touching, but it also emphasises the scale of the task they face. For the most part, it’s a challenge undertaken with zeal and good humour, which means that the film is ultimately a comfortable watch; though cool-headed enough to evade emotional manipulation, its tendency is to accentuate the positive. Yet certain moments offer glimpses of what might befall these kids without the intervention of dedicated and encouraging educators. On hearing that Rama has been difficult in class, her mother immediately threatens to send her back to her father’s family in Senegal, saying, “Remember how they beat you? They hurt you until they scarred your head.” Djenabou, living in Paris with relatives, is reminded of her own good fortune in escaping a future that in her native Guinea would likely have included genital mutilation and forced marriage. Others carry burdens of other kinds: Mihajlo, as the only French-speaker in his Serbian family, is so busy translating asylum documents at home that his schoolwork is suffering; Xin barely speaks French because she barely speaks, being mostly at home alone while her mother works.

This stuff is inescapably moving, and hard to resist; so too is the creativity the children reveal with the slightest prompting. One proves to be a nascent cartoonist; another is possessed of a gorgeous singing voice. By focusing on the innocent and predominantly adorable baggage of immigration rather than interrogating those who have made conscious choices or policy decisions about it, Bertuccelli (known for 2003’s *Since Otar Left* and 2010’s *The Tree*) arguably ducks the awkward politics of the matter; for the most part, the film remains in the discreetly inspiring territory of the gentle observational documentaries, many of them classroom-based, that have proliferated since the success of Nicolas Philibert’s *Être et Avoir* in 2002. For many it will also call to mind Laurent Cantet’s celebrated 2008 fiction film *The Class*. But as its title suggests, *School of Babel* is concerned as much with language as with education or politics. It is also entirely distinct for the simple reason that each of its subjects is an individual with a unique and complicated life story – a point the film makes with grace and directness. 🍷

## St. Vincent

USA 2014

Director: Theodore Melfi

### Reviewed by Jason Anderson

There’s one scene in *St. Vincent* which fully demonstrates the laconic charm, the welcome lack of vanity and the fondness for unexpected curveballs that have long made Bill Murray one of American screen comedy’s most valuable players. Perversely, this magic moment – in which Murray’s grouchy-geezer title character sits down in his backyard, sneaks a cigarette after retrieving it from its hiding place and messes around with a garden hose, all the while warbling along to the Bob Dylan song playing on his Walkman headphones – unfolds alongside *St. Vincent*’s final credits. If only there were more scenes genuinely worthy of the man in this serviceable but often Maudlin comedy-drama by writer-director Theodore Melfi.

A veteran commercials director making his feature debut, Melfi wooed Murray after months of leaving messages on the management-averse actor’s infamous 1-800 number. It’s easy to see the project’s appeal for Murray, since it presents a brasher side than the actor usually gets the chance to show. With his stream of expletive-laden grumbling and burly, bawdy manner, Vincent is a far cry from Murray’s more taciturn and world-weary screen adult egos in Sofia Coppola’s *Lost in Translation* (2003) and Jim Jarmusch’s *Broken Flowers* (2005). Because Vincent is an unfit, possibly hazardous adult mentor to a lad in need of guidance, Murray’s performance here has a clear antecedent in his career-reviving turn as the depressed industrialist in Wes Anderson’s *Rushmore* (1998), though it may be more accurate to regard it as a time-weathered variation on the cocky loudmouths he played in *Stripes* (1981) and other early hits with director Ivan Reitman.

The opening shot of Vincent telling a Polish joke in a coarse Brooklyn accent would seem to herald many more opportunities to let loose and cause some trouble. Instead, the film’s



Soldiering on: Bill Murray

schmaltz tendencies prevail, and Melfi wastes little time in letting the audience know that this gruff, salty codger is soft as pudding on the inside. The director would’ve had more success selling us on Vincent’s transition from harsh to sweet if Murray had more rapport with his young co-star Jaeden Lieberher, who’s fine as Oliver, the son of new neighbour Maggie (Melissa McCarthy), but tends to disappear amid the broader business with the adults around him.

Playing it straight after wild-card turns in hits such as *Bridesmaids* (2011) and *The Heat* (2013), McCarthy does what she can with a conventional fretful-single-mum role, while Chris O’Dowd, donning a dog collar to play a teacher at Oliver’s Catholic school, is content to stay at the periphery and let Murray own the show. Indeed, the only real challenge to the star’s spot at the centre comes from Naomi Watts as pregnant Russian prostitute Daka, countering Murray with a brassy, snarky energy that’s all the more impressive given the impediment posed by her clearly phoney prosthetic belly. Along with the Dylan singalong in the final moments, she is one of the better reasons to get through *St. Vincent*’s increasingly soppy and sloppy second half. 🍷

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Theodore Melfi  
Fred Roos  
Peter Chernin  
Jenno Topping  
**Written by**  
Theodore Melfi  
**Director of Photography**  
John Lindley  
**Edited by**  
Peter Tescher  
Sarah Flack  
**Production Designer**  
Inbal Weinberg  
**Music**  
Theodore Shapiro  
**Re-recording Mixers**  
Roberto Fernandez  
Damian Volpe  
**Costume Designer**  
Kasia Walicka Maimone

©St. V Films  
2013 LLC.  
**Production Companies**  
The Weinstein Company  
presents a Chernin Entertainment production  
Filmed with the support of the New

York State Governor’s Office for Motion Picture & Television Development  
**Executive Producers**  
Dylan Sellers  
Don Cheadle  
G. Mac Brown  
Bob Weinstein  
Harvey Weinstein

**Cast**  
**Bill Murray**  
Vincent  
**Melissa McCarthy**  
Maggie  
**Naomi Watts**  
Daka  
**Chris O’Dowd**  
Brother Geraghty  
**Terrence Howard**  
Zucko  
**Jaeden Lieberher**  
Oliver  
**Lenny Venito**  
Coach Mitchell  
**Nate Corddry**  
Terry, the banker  
**Dario Barosso**  
Ocinski  
**Kimberly Quinn**  
Ana, nurse  
**Donna Mitchell**  
Sandy

**Ann Dowd**  
Shirley, Sunnyside administrator  
**Scott Adsit**  
David  
**Reg E. Cathey**  
Gus  
**Deirdre O’Connell**  
Linda  
**Ray Lannicelli**  
Roger

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

**Brooklyn, the present.** Maggie is a single mother newly separated from her unfaithful husband. She and her 12-year-old son Oliver move in next door to Vincent, a retired Vietnam veteran who spends his time betting at the racetrack and drinking at a local bar. When school bullies steal Oliver’s phone and house keys, Vincent allows the boy to stay on at his house after school. Working long hours as a hospital technician, Maggie hires Vincent to be Oliver’s babysitter, despite his curmudgeonly manner. Oliver and Vincent bond over trips to the track and fighting lessons; Oliver puts the latter to use at school, breaking the nose of one of his bullies.

Vincent devotedly cares for his wife, who has been hospitalised due to dementia, and is fond of Daka, a Russian stripper and prostitute who is carrying his baby. News of Vincent and Oliver’s inappropriate outings emerges during Maggie’s custody battle with her husband, and when Vincent takes Oliver’s share of a winning bet in order to pay an outstanding bill at his wife’s care facility. Vincent suffers a stroke during a confrontation over money owed to a bookie. Returning home after several weeks of rehab, Vincent learns that his wife has died. Daka tricks Vincent into attending a school presentation in which Oliver reveals Vincent’s acts of war heroism and highlights his most saintly virtues.

Sometime later: Vincent enjoys dinner with Maggie, Oliver, Daka and their new baby.

## The Theory of Everything

USA/United Kingdom/Japan 2014

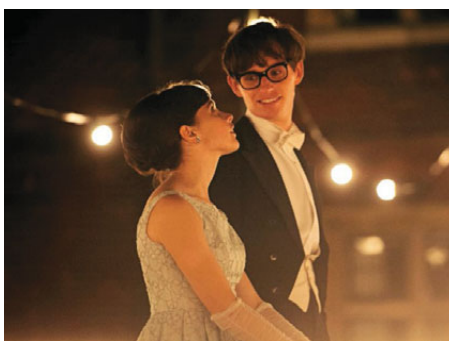
Director: James Marsh

Certificate 12A 123m 24s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The saga of Stephen Hawking, an almost cruelly dramatic illustration of the gulf between the mind's boundless capacity and the body's debilitating frailties, presents such a potent combination of pathos and triumph that it's an inevitability that producers come calling. After the 2004 BBC drama *Hawking* (a youthful Benedict Cumberbatch's first lead) and Stephen Finnigan's 2013 biographical doc of the same name, where the subject told his own story, the latest offering is this handsome cinema adaptation of first wife Jane's memoir *Travelling to Infinity: My Life with Stephen*. Here, screenwriter Anthony McCarten opts to cover more than two decades, where Hawking's trajectory from Cambridge PhD candidate to noted academic and then bestselling author runs alongside Motor Neurone Disease's encroaching physical deterioration, and indeed the flame and burnout of a marriage – which confronted the ravages of his disabilities and provided three children before its eventual resigned dissolution.

This perhaps unfamiliar personal element brings a bittersweet note presumably intended to enrich the film's emotional profile, and what's mesmerising about the performances of Eddie Redmayne and Felicity Jones in the central roles is how they sustain the characters' fundamental feelings for each other while surmounting the daunting challenges of physical verisimilitude and the encapsulation of much esoteric science into digestible dialogue. Both performances convey a deeply ingrained sense of lived-in emotion, and though Redmayne's approach to capturing Hawking's gnarled physiognomy is certainly in the Daniel Day-Lewis class, Jones's passage from girlish innocence to weary housewifely knowingness is less showy but every bit as remarkable. Indeed, there's meticulous craft throughout, with Benoît Delhomme's vintage-looking cinematography uncannily responsive to the myriad murky hues of British 1960s and 70s knitwear, and *Shadow Dancer* director James



The psi at night: Felicity Jones, Eddie Redmayne

Marsh showing a keen grasp of the expressive possibilities of every milieu, from collegiate digs to haphazard domesticity, and bringing some unifying thematic design to the visuals, with turning bicycle wheels and the swirl of cream in coffee among the images hinting at Hawking's theorising on time and the universe.

However, even with all this quality on display, the film rather confoundingly fails to move us. Perhaps the very meticulousness of its understatement, wryly downplaying the passion and anger seemingly inherent in the material, has the effect of lowering the emotional temperature beyond resuscitation. Seemingly, this is what you get when Hawking's rationalism has the upper hand in the storytelling, eclipsing his spouse's spiritual and indeed poetic side (her interest in medieval Iberian verse going tantalisingly underexplored) as if emotive communication were just one more tricky equation to be mastered. Maybe, if Stephen and Jane can reconcile themselves with such sensible maturity to the passing of a marriage into which they put such love and sinew, we shouldn't be crying for them after all, but it does seem short change for a viewer to traverse these extraordinary events and meet such extraordinary individuals only to be left in a state of semi-engaged reflectiveness. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Tim Bevan  
Eric Fellner  
Lisa Bruce  
Anthony McCarten  
**Screenplay**  
Anthony McCarten  
Based on the book  
*Travelling to Infinity: My Life with Stephen*  
by Jane Hawking  
**Director of**

#### Photography

Benoît Delhomme  
**Editor**  
Jinx Godfrey  
**Production Designer**  
John Paul Kelly  
**Music**  
Johann Jóhannsson  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Colin Nicolson  
**Costume Designer**

Steven Noble

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**Production Companies**  
Focus Features  
presents a Working  
Title production  
Presented in  
association with  
Dentsu Inc./  
Fuji Television

Network, Inc.

**Executive Producers**  
Amelia Granger  
Liza Chasin  
David Kosse

#### Cast

**Eddie Redmayne**  
Stephen Hawking  
**Felicity Jones**  
Jane Wilde

Charlie Cox

Jonathan Hellyer  
Jones  
**Emily Watson**  
Beryl Wilde  
**Simon McBurney**  
Frank Hawking  
**David Thewlis**  
Dennis Sciamia  
**Maxine Peake**  
Elaine Mason  
**Harry Lloyd**

Brian

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures  
International  
UK & Eire

Cambridge University, 1963. PhD physics candidate Stephen Hawking falls for arts student Jane Wilde, and discovers a subject for his doctorate, reworking noted mathematician Roger Penrose's study of the decay of collapsed stars to posit that the universe itself exploded from a black hole. Stephen's increased physical frailty leads to a diagnosis of the degenerative motor neurone disease, and he is given only two years to live. He's devastated by the news, but Jane professes her love and her determination to fight the condition together. Their marriage and his doctorate award are followed by children and further acclaimed research, but also by physical deterioration inhibiting speech and movement. The pressure of caring for her husband and raising

a family tells on Jane, who joins a church choir and befriends widowed choir master Jonathan Hellyer Jones. His care assistance becomes invaluable to the Hawking family as Stephen explores a radical new concept based on a universe without boundaries. Jane and Jonathan eventually consummate their mutual attraction during a camping trip without Stephen, just when he suffers a life-threatening collapse prompting a tracheotomy. Jonathan withdraws, while Stephen becomes close to his speech therapist Elaine Mason. He and Jane reflect on the end of their marriage. Eventually, as his book 'A Brief History of Time' brings him celebrity, Stephen chooses to be with Elaine. However, when he is made a CBE at Buckingham Palace, he attends with Jane.

## We Are the Giant

USA/United Kingdom 2014

Director: Greg Barker


Certificate 15 92m 5s

### Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

Greg Barker's *We Are the Giant* joins the minicanon of films about the uprisings across the Middle East that draw on citizen journalism, social media and grassroots activists to tell their stories. Hana Makhmalbaf initiated the trend with *Green Days* (2009), a drama built around collaged cameraphone footage of the post-election protests in Tehran, and Jehane Noujaim's *The Square* (2013) was likewise caught up in the excitement of watching history happen; the fact that the film's editor Sanaa Seif has been sentenced to three years in prison is a sober reminder that the Egyptian people's struggle is ongoing.

Zainab and Maryam, two of the six central subjects of Barker's film, know the cycle of revolutionary activism and government crackdown only too well: as the daughters of Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, an internationally acclaimed Bahraini human rights activist, they grew up as political refugees in Denmark. A story their father told them as children, recounted here by Zainab, gives the film its title: "The people are like a giant. The government is a little small man... Why is it that this little small man can control the giant who is sitting there like a slave with his hands in chains?"

Such bedtime parables have inspired both daughters to become activists since returning to Bahrain on the accession of the supposedly reforming King Hamad in 2002. Zainab, tweeting as @angryarabiya, observed and participated in calls for a small peaceful protest at Pearl Roundabout in 2011, and stayed involved as the demonstrations grew. There's particularly striking footage of a protest where one side of the main road is entirely filled with men in white shirts, the other with women in black chadors, a thin line of green trees between them – it's like something from a Shirin Neshat film.

Maryam and Zainab's story is the third part of the film's triptych and by far the most complex, fascinating, involving and rewarding. That's partly because limited prior coverage of Bahrain creates a sense of urgent discovery for Barker's narrative, and partly because Zainab and Maryam are from a family of professional activists. Zainab's peaceful protests have seen her jailed eight times; Maryam has returned to political asylum in Copenhagen; and Abdulhadi is imprisoned 



Stop and dare: *We Are the Giant*



and has been tortured beyond recognition. Their wrenching personal story is one of heartbreak – but it makes them media-savvy.

Part of the film's strength, and its compromise, comes from its media-friendly, westernised subjects. Osama and Muhannad, whose frontline involvement in the Libyan revolution opens the film, are anglophone naturalised Americans. And from the American Revolution graphics of the credits onwards, it's strongly implied that the Arab Spring is importing American democracy and western human rights – an idea that's contentious at best. The film's American perspective also means that political and social distinctions between Bahrain, Libya and Syria are blurred. There would have been more room for complex analysis had less space been given to decontextualised nostrums from famous revolutionaries, played amid fussy, homogenising newsprint montages of 20th-century revolutions in which Lenin and the Prague Spring are undifferentiated.

Excerpts from speeches by Aung San Suu Kyi and Nelson Mandela about shifting from non-violent resistance to sabotage and self-defence usefully foreground the film's unresolved theme. Muhannad's story glamorises revolutionary violence, while the Syrians and Bahrainis speak against it. Again, it's Zainab who carries the day with a story: a history of Maori non-violent resistance which reminds western viewers that we haven't always been on the right-on side, and which offers a vision of daughterly and sisterly power at the heart of the bigger revolution. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
John Battsek  
Julie Goldman  
Greg Barker  
**Directors of Photography**  
Muhammed Hamdy  
Frank-Peter Lehmann  
**Editor**  
Joshua Altman  
**Music Composed and Performed by**  
Philip Sheppard  
**Sound Recordist**  
Steve Utt

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**Production Companies**  
Screen Pass  
Pictures, Corniche  
Pictures and Bertha  
Foundation in  
association with  
The Ford Foundation  
present a Passion  
Pictures & Motto  
Pictures production  
in association with  
Prettybird Pictures  
Produced in  
association with  
The Mill  
**Executive Producers**  
Christina Weiss Lurie

Hani Farsi  
Jeffrey Lurie  
Tony Tabatznik

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Kaleidoscope Film  
Distribution

**A documentary telling the stories of some of the individuals involved in protests against governments across the Arab world since 2011.**

In Libya, Libyan-Americans Muhannad and his father Osama were on the front line in battles that led to the fall of Colonel Gaddafi. Muhannad's death in action, reported in western media, contributed to support for the air strikes that ended the regime.

In Syria, non-violent protesters Ghassan and Motaz met while organising protests for legislative change, and were later arrested and threatened by secret police. They argue that the establishment of the Free Syrian Army led to external militarisation and defeated the revolution.

In Bahrain, Zainab and her father, the renowned human-rights activist Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, are determined to preserve the non-violent nature of their protests. Both are currently in prison. Zainab's sister Maryam, a Copenhagen-based activist, has taken their case to Washington but to no avail.

## The Woman in Black: Angel of Death

United Kingdom/USA/Canada 2014

Director: Tom Harper

Certificate 15 98m 0s

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

As a follow-up to what has become a durable – and malleable – horror text across a diverse range of media, *The Woman in Black: Angel of Death* has taken a peculiarly circuitous route in reaching the screen. Susan Hill, author of the original novella whose adaptations span a long-running West End stage play, a still chilling TV production penned by Nigel Kneale, a BBC radio version and, most recently, a Daniel Radcliffe-starring feature, supplied the kernel of an idea; this formed the basis of writer Jon Croker's screenplay, which then became the source for a 2013 novelisation by Martyn Waites. Reaction to the latter proved tepid, a *Guardian* review complaining that it had "so obviously been formed by a film studio's agenda that it feels like a case of putting the cart before the ghost". It maybe didn't help that Hill had herself recently published a new novella, *Dolly*, which featured elements also existing in Croker's script – namely a traumatised boy called Edward and a ghastly antique toy.

For *Angel of Death*, the personnel has changed, with Croker and director Tom Harper replacing *The Woman in Black's* Jane Goldman and James Watkins, but the drill remains very similar: old-school, moderately atmospheric spookiness aggressively punctuated by the jarringly-loud-noise shtick of much latter-day horror. An initially well-worked scenario sets events 40 years on from the first story, as schoolteacher Eve Parkins (Phoebe Fox) is despatched with a class of evacuees from Blitz-pounded London to the gloomy village of Crythin Gifford. Already unnerved on arrival, Eve is further alarmed by the group's eventual lodgings: the haunted, mouldering estate of Eel Marsh House, isolated from the village by a causeway across marshland. For the eponymous spectre-in-residence, the sudden presence of vulnerable, uprooted children signifies rich pickings; for Eve, the harrowing stay excavates the memory of a buried personal trauma – one keenly understood and exploited by what infests the house (the mythology of which is laboriously re-explained).



All about Eve: Phoebe Fox

With Eve's tremulous authority figure, her impressionable young charges and an old, dark house, we seem to be in the mode of *The Innocents* and *The Others*, at least superficially. But in contrast to those superior ghost stories, there's no room for ambiguity here: what you see is very much what you get. *Angel of Death* is more interested in juxtaposing the house's aura of doom with wartime horrors, a strategy that's artfully introduced in the opening moments, as the phantom bumps echoing from Eel Marsh House become the thud of German bombs above a tube station. Unlike C.S. Lewis's Narnia or the fantasy realm of *Pan's Labyrinth*, the countryside here offers no escape, only a less banal sort of evil. This approach yields forceful, if sometimes crass, imagery: a boy lured to his death on barbed wire in marshland, another child suffocated by a gas mask.

The film is less successful when attempting to give secondary characters extra resonance (Jeremy Irvine's troubled RAF pilot seems tacked on to provide a contrived bit of poetic play with fate) and in some misplaced action sequences, notably an explosion-filled pursuit at a decoy airfield that lurches into absurdity. The frights, boosted considerably by DP George Steel's judicious framing, occasionally startle but are exhaustively overused; for a tale pervaded by withheld suffering, we ultimately see too much. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Richard Jackson  
Simon Oakes  
Ben Holden  
Tobin Armbrust  
**Screenplay**  
Jon Croker  
**Story**  
Susan Hill  
**Director of Photography**  
George Steel  
**Editor**  
Mark Eckersley  
**Production Designer**  
Jacqueline Abrahams  
**Music**  
Marco Beltrami  
Marcus Trumpp  
Brandon Roberts  
**Sound Mixer**  
Ian Voigt  
**Costume Designer**  
Annie Symons

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Films Limited  
**Production Companies**

Entertainment  
One and Hammer  
Films present a  
Talisman production  
in association with  
Hammer Films  
Made in association  
with Manu Propria  
Entertainment, LLC  
**Executive Producers**  
Guy East  
Marc Schipper  
Nigel Sinclair  
Neil Dunn  
Graeme Witts  
Xavier Marchand  
Roy Lee  
Richard Toussaint  
Wade Barker

#### Cast

Phoebe Fox  
Eve Parkins  
Jeremy Irvine  
Harry Burnstow  
Helen McCrory  
Jean Hogg  
Adrian Rawlins

Dr Rhodes  
Leanne Best  
Jennet Humfrye, the  
woman in black  
Ned Dennehy  
Jacob, hermit  
Oaklee Pendergast  
Edward  
Jude Wright  
Tom  
Eve Pearce  
voice of Alice Drablow

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
E1 Films

London, 1941. During the Blitz, schoolteacher Eve Parkins is sent with a class of evacuees to the derelict Eel Marsh House, isolated from the village of Crythin Gifford by a causeway across marshland. Eve befriends Harry, an RAF pilot posted nearby. At night, Eve detects a watchful presence – as does Edward, a boy who has been mute since witnessing his mother's death in a bombing raid. Tom, a boy who had bullied Edward, walks in a trance to his death on the marshes. From recordings made by the house's former owner, Alice Drablow, Harry and Eve surmise that the estate is haunted by Alice's sister Jennet, who killed herself following the death of her son. Harry confesses to Eve that he was discharged following a costly aerial accident; he now merely guards a decoy airfield. Eve reveals that years before, she nearly died in childbirth and subsequently lost trace of the baby – she suggests that Jennet is punishing her for her negligence by targeting Edward. After another child dies under Jennet's influence, Edward goes missing. Eve and Harry find him at the airfield, where an explosion seems to consume him. Returning to the house, Eve spots Edward wading into the marshes. Both are saved by Harry, who drowns after being pulled under by the ghosts of Jennet's past victims.

# UNMISSABLE FESTIVAL HITS

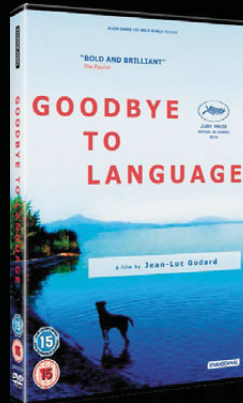


## EL NINO

A gripping thriller about a young man who, struggling for money, is sucked into the world of drug trafficking across the Gibraltar straits.



OUT ON DVD DECEMBER 1<sup>ST</sup>



## GOODBYE TO LANGUAGE

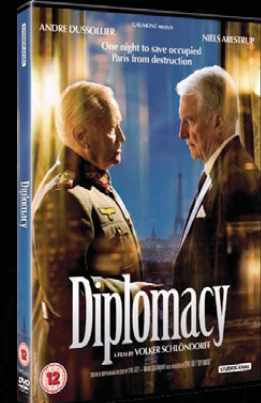
A stunning, visionary, and unforgettable experience from master of cinema Jean-Luc Godard.

**'Bold and brilliant'**

The Playlist



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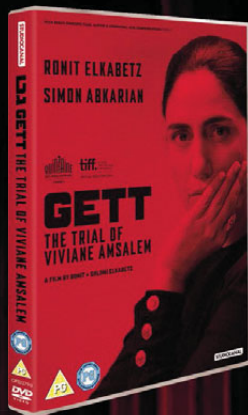


## DIPLOMACY

A taut wartime drama, set in 1944. On the eve of the Allies entering Paris, Hitler orders the city be destroyed. One man is tasked to convince the commanding German officer to change his mind.



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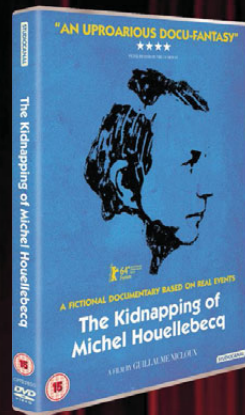


## GETT: THE TRIAL OF VIVIANE AMSALEM

Set entirely in a marital courtroom, the film follows Viviane Amsalem's furious attempt to escape a loveless marriage and exposes Israel's antiquated divorce laws.



OUT ON DVD DECEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup>



## THE KIDNAPPING OF MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ

Partly based on real-life events and starring Michel Houellebecq himself, this dark comedy reveals what really happened to the author when he went missing in 2011.

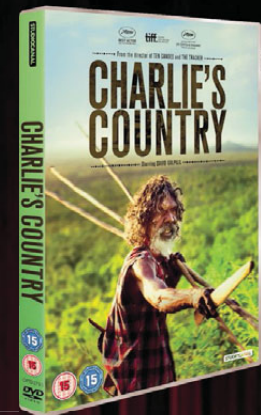
**'An uproarious docu-fantasy'**



Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian



OUT ON DVD DECEMBER 22<sup>ND</sup>



## CHARLIE'S COUNTRY

A poignant tale of a native Aborigine who struggles to understand the cultural ties in a world dominated by western civilisation.



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FESTIVAL DE CANNES

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**STUDIOCANAL**



# Home cinema



One heck of a ride: Jack Nicholson and Millie Perkins in *The Shooting*

## WAY OUT WEST

Monte Hellman's strange career produced some of American cinema's most individual and unorthodox westerns

### THE SHOOTING/ RIDE IN THE WHIRLWIND

Monte Hellman; USA 1966; Criterion Collection/  
Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 81/82 minutes; 1.85:1;  
Features: audio commentaries, interviews, new video  
appreciation of Warren Oates by Kim Morgan, essay

#### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

In the 1970s, Monte Hellman directed Warren Oates in two movies that a few film lovers – this writer included – consider among the most beautiful and individual American movies of the decade: *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971) and

*Cockfighter* (1974). Both were more *succès d'estime* than big box office, and so Hellman celebrated his triumphs in by-then accustomed style: he looked for work where he could get it. He helmed an episode of the TV show *Baretta*; helped to finish a Muhammad Ali biopic starring Ali himself, *The Greatest*, after the death of the film's director; and, always able to find a demand for his formidable editing skills, cut Sam Peckinpah's *The Killer Elite* (1975, newly available on Blu-ray from Twilight Time). Peckinpah would later return the favour by making a cameo appearance as a writer of dime novels in Hellman's last collaboration with Oates, a Spanish-Italian co-production called *China 9, Liberty 37* (1978), one of three highly unorthodox westerns that Hellman made. It's been a strange career.

While Hellman isn't usually thought of as a director who has specialised in oaters, he is that

as much – or more – than he is any other single thing. "Monte Hellman makes westerns," began a piece on Hellman by Chuck Stephens in the March/April 2000 *Film Comment*, published when the director's work was accessible to a younger audience for the first time in ages thanks to new home-video availability. "He's made them again and again. He's made them in Utah and he's made them in Europe; he's made them with horses and he's made them with hot rods."

The western is a natural fit for a filmmaker given to narratives of solitary, private, driven men – a filmmaker who himself spent much of his working life in the margins. In this, and in his dogged adherence to an idea of his artistic integrity despite insupportable odds and non-existent budgets, Hellman could be compared to an Edgar G. Ulmer. Indeed, the improbable, zigzag path described by Hellman's career

might seem like so many of the tall tales that Ulmer was given to telling, were it not for the fact that we have documentation to prove that he really *did* dice together the footage of Davy Jones dancing to 'Daddy's Song' in the Monkees movie *Head* (1968), he really did shoot second unit action on *RoboCop* (1987), direct the third film in the *Silent Night, Deadly Night* franchise and, yes, produce *Reservoir Dogs* (1992).

As that unlikely CV suggests, Hellman kept the bit between his teeth through decades of neglect, which only ended with *Two-Lane Blacktop*'s first-ever DVD release in 1999. The migration of Hellman's work to home video, however, is a process that's still ongoing. *China 9, Liberty 37* has yet to receive a worthy treatment and Hellman's 1988 *Iguana* was until recently in the same boat, though this situation has been remedied by Raro Video. The disc was reviewed in the DVD section of this magazine's December 2014 issue by Michael Atkinson, who also contributed the liner notes to Criterion's new Blu-ray release of two westerns – the kind with horses – that Hellman shot back-to-back in 1965, *The Shooting* and *Ride in the Whirlwind*.

Like several of his generation's best and brightest filmmakers, Hellman entered the industry under the tutelage of Roger Corman, and his ability to improvise, as well as his dab-handed cutting, made him indispensable. Their professional relationship began when Corman invested in the first West Coast staging of *Waiting for Godot* – the play's young director, Hellman, staged it as a western, with Lucky as a Native American and Pozzo as a rancher. (This was years before Sam Shepard won fame for translating Beckettian verse into the American vernacular.) The circumstances of their meeting would come to seem auspicious a few years later, when Corman gave Hellman a few bucks and six weeks to make two westerns out in Kanab, Utah, the one-time headquarters for the likes of John Ford and Howard Hawks when shooting in the surrounding desert. Hellman had pulled off something very like this before, filming *Back Door to Hell* and *Flight to Fury* in the Philippines (both 1964, and both in need of a decent DVD release). His primary collaborator on those films, as in this new endeavour, was a friend he'd met in one of Jeff Corey's acting classes, a Corman contract star who was going to be playing in and serving as producer for the two films, one of which he'd scripted: Mr Jack Nicholson.

What Hellman and Nicholson came back with was something situated between Ford's Monument Valley and Antonioni's *Red Desert*, or like Anthony Mann, if Mann's primary points of reference had been Robbe-Grillet and Beckett instead of Shakespeare. If they'd invented the acid western, as some would later claim, very few seemed to notice at the time outside of Paris, where *The Shooting* played for the better part of a year. Actor Will Hutchins, who co-starred with Nicholson and Oates in *The Shooting*, says that the crew assembled to film his DVD extra interview "is bigger than our crew was". This is one of several interviews with the films' miniscule cast and crew on Criterion's new

## *The western is a natural fit for a filmmaker given to narratives of solitary, private, driven men*

double-bill package, most of which are conducted by Hellman himself. The funniest of these is a brief visit to a tight-lipped Harry Dean Stanton, who appears in the Nicholson-scripted *Ride in the Whirlwind*, and who is either unwilling or unable to stroll down memory lane.

*Ride in the Whirlwind* comes at least somewhere near to satisfying audience expectations, beginning and ending as it does with blazing six-shooters. Nicholson plays a travelling cowpoke who, in a case of mistaken identity, attracts the attention of a vigilante posse, looking to string him up for crimes committed by a gang led by the man credited as 'Dean Stanton'. *Ride* was begun three days after Hellman wrapped on *The Shooting* – the more formally daring of the two pictures, though they share a stark, figures-in-a-landscape quality, a by-product of paucity of means that's often described as 'existentialist', though there's a clear guiding intelligence at work here that justifies the handle.


Nicholson doesn't show up until the second act of *The Shooting* – up to that point the film is carried by Oates, playing an ex-bounty hunter named Willet Gashade who's hired to follow a trail; Hutchins, playing his dull-witted friend Coley, who joins him; and Millie Perkins, playing the nameless woman who does the hiring. A model-turned-actress who'd made her breakthrough in George Stevens's *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), Perkins gives a performance that's out of place amid the general tone of saddlesore naturalism. (She also has a smaller role in *Whirlwind*.) This isn't just because she's the lone female on the

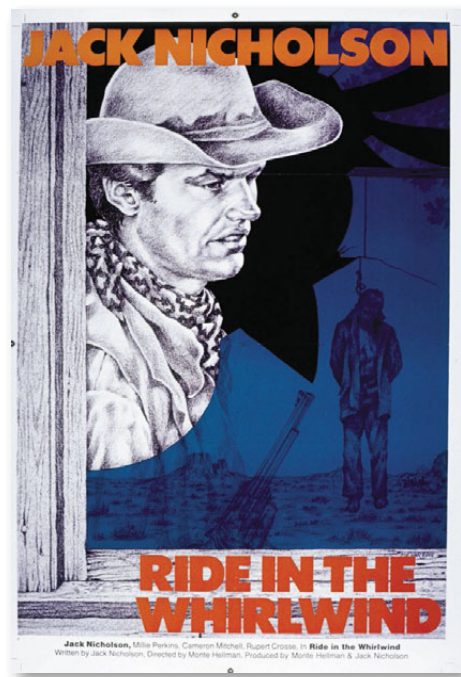
range, it's also because of her line readings, which vacillate between flat and shrill in the petulant style of early John Waters. The dissonance of mismatched acting styles would appear to be music to Hellman's ears, if this and *Two-Lane Blacktop*'s counterpoising of Oates's bravura BS artist against the affectless trio of James Taylor, Dennis Wilson and Laurie Bird are indicators.

The script for *The Shooting* was written by Carole Eastman, a mutual friend of Hellman's and Nicholson's, whose later credits include classics of Nicholsonia such as *Five Easy Pieces* (1970) – likewise written under the pseudonym 'Adrien Joyce' – and *The Fortune* (1975). Eastman has a marvellous ear for high-plains argot – "She's been japin' you, can't you sense? Now quit, before you get tromped on" – and specialises in quarrelsome-to-acrimonious relations between the sexes, also chief among Hellman's preoccupations.

Hellman's collaboration with DP Gregory Sandor was similarly fortuitous, and together they manage some indelible theatre-of-the-absurd effects – for example, when Hutchins, in the opening of *The Shooting*, is spooked by a gunshot and goes tearing up a hillside, clenching a punctured bag of flour all the way and leaving a billowing white cloud in his wake.

*Two-Lane Blacktop* is a film about drag racing that doesn't contain a single tense or even coherent car race, while the cockfighting in *Cockfighter* stands in for the final futility of any competitive endeavour – however noble, however necessary. *The Shooting*, meanwhile, is a revenge-driven western that provides no ultimate satisfaction. The party breaks into pieces, though Hellman continues to tie the characters together through sly parallel editing. Coley discovers a man who's been abandoned to die in the desert, and leaves him a few pieces of candy to suck on and a pocket ball-bearing game, the film's last, futile gesture of mercy. The chase is eventually reduced to a spectacle of dwarfed figures staggering through a barren landscape, the completion of their mission meaning almost certain suicide, a long, long way round on a switchback trail: they've been chasing Gashade's brother, the mirror image of Gashade himself.

This is approaching Peckinpah territory, though at the time Peckinpah was busy plunging into career purgatory. He wasn't wholly Bloody Sam yet in 1966 and Jack Nicholson was a few years removed from being 'Jack', while Monte Hellman was entirely himself – whatever that was. Given the extreme scepticism with which Hellman views playing the game in his films, it's perhaps unsurprising that his career didn't have a trajectory like that of his more famous friends and collaborators. "Monte was a real talent," executive Mike Medavoy is quoted as saying in Marc Eliot's 2013 biography of Nicholson, "but he was also a cipher. No one could ever figure him out. He could have been a great studio director but he wanted to go his own way. Only nobody, maybe [not] even him, could figure out what that way was." In 2010, Hellman directed his first film in more than 20 years, the title a better summation of his 'way' than any movie could hope to be: *Road to Nowhere*. 



Publicity material featuring Nicholson



# New releases

## BUNNY LAKE IS MISSING

Otto Preminger; USA/UK 1965 Twilight Time/Region A Blu-ray; 107 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: isolated score track, audio commentary with film historians Lem Dobbs, Julie Kirgo and Nick Redman, original theatrical trailer

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

Ann Lake (Carol Lynley), a young, single, American mother newly arrived in London, goes to pick up her four-year-old daughter Bunny after her first day at school, and discovers that the girl is missing. Ann's brother and helpmate Steve (Keir Dullea) flies to be at her side, but everyone else presents a vaguely sinister rather than helpful aspect. There is the founder of the Little People's Garden nursery school, Ms Ada Ford (Martita Hunt), who resides in an attic room and entertains herself with tape recordings of children's nightmares. There is Ann's new landlord (Noël Coward), a plummy, rummy, polymorphous pervert who collects S&M gear and recites poetry for BBC radio professionally – “like a Welsh parson gargling molasses” is the opinion of the lead inspector on the case (Laurence Olivier), who begins to suspect that there was never such a person as Bunny Lake. (The pip of a script is courtesy of John and Penelope Mortimer.) And there are also The Zombies, rather prominently featured on a 23” TV set in a pub – either a pushy piece of record-label product placement or director Otto Preminger's commentary on the ubiquity of mass-media interruption, depending on who you listen to.

“Curiouser and curiouser,” as Ms Ford says, though as it turns out, the knowing, corrupt flower of English thespianism collected here have nothing on the horrible innocence of the Americans in their midst. An open flame being put to a little girl's doll is the most violent thing that occurs on screen here, but the film's emotional violence, and the implications thereof, are really rattling. Yet *Bunny Lake Is Missing* demands to be viewed and reviewed – reviewed for clues to its last-act revelation hidden in performance and in *mise en scène*, then for the pleasure of that *mise en scène* alone, the way in which Preminger's camera, always unperturbed, negotiates its way through a crowd of squalling children, a ‘doll hospital’ in Soho or a real hospital's dungeon-like sub-basement. If David Fincher is really the inheritor of Preminger's detached, analytical style, he has some way to go before matching this gone girl. **Disc:** Twilight Time aren't usually much for the bells and whistles but the presence of a commentary track here attests to the fact that they know this is no ordinary property. The black-and-white widescreen, that most unsavoury of formats, looks marvellous.

## THE DAY THE EARTH CAUGHT FIRE

Val Guest; UK 1961; BFI/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 99 minutes; Certificate PG; 2.35:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: commentary, interviews, documentaries, critical appreciation, trailers, stills gallery, booklet

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

In the newly shot documentary accompanying this exemplary release, *S&S* contributor Kim Newman observes: “British science fiction was weirdly cutting edge... it was obsessed with the weather.” Indeed, what's most



**Hot topic: *The Day the Earth Caught Fire***

striking about Val Guest's feature-length we're-all-going-to-die *cri de cœur* is that once one strips out the nuclear-paranoia elements (the central scenario sees two simultaneous H-bomb explosions shifting the Earth's axis and sending it inexorably towards the sun), it becomes a startlingly prescient parable about contemporary global warming and mankind's lack of preparedness for consequences ranging from water-rationing to full-blown civil disorder.

Not that it is especially up to date elsewhere, though it offers a fascinating reminder that the *Daily Express* was once a broadsheet newspaper with agenda-setting ambitions. (In an amusing coincidence the film was released the year Princess Diana, on whom the paper would later obsessively fixate, was born.) Indeed, so keen was the *Express* to emphasise these qualities that the filmmakers were granted considerable access to the paper's facilities, with recently retired editor Arthur Christiansen effectively playing himself – although the fact that he and his employees (headed by Edward Judd's hard-drinking divorcé and Leo McKern's cynical pessimist) all talk in hard-boiled one-liners seems based more on wishful thinking than contemporary reality.

But this, and the protagonists' constant pressure to get the story, means that, despite the lack of conventional action scenes, the film is consistently pacy and engrossing – Guest always had a keen eye for telling procedural detail, as he also amply demonstrated in his next film, the underrated 1962 thriller *Jigsaw* (which has just made its British DVD debut courtesy of Renown). **Disc:** This would be worth buying for the BFI's superlative 4K-sourced restoration alone (which includes the orange-tinted opening and closing sequences), but they've thrown in unusually generous extras, including a new documentary about the film and an audio appreciation by critic Graeme Hobbs, archive interviews with Guest and McKern and three hefty civil-defence information films from 1952-62.

## THE DEATH KISS

Edwin L. Marin; USA 1932; Kino Classics/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 71 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: audio commentary by historian Richard Harland Smith

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

A surprising and forgotten fossil from Hollywood's Poverty Row in the early talkie age, this ambitious little murder mystery is set

entirely on the lot of Tiffany Pictures (renamed, with possible satiric intent, Tonart), a tiny B-movie factory that closed the same year.

It has the kind of opening you didn't see in 1932 outside of Mamoulian and Ulmer: a nearly two-minute tracking shot from a car interior to a nightclub exterior, featuring multiple dialogue exchanges and culminating in a drive-by murder on the steps and a pan over to the film crew, with testy director Tom Avery (Edward Van Sloan) shooting the titular thriller.

It's only a movie, except life imitates art and the star is really dead – leaving nosy young staff screenwriter Franklyn Drew (David Manners) to get one up on the stodgy police and investigate. The hall of mirrors is pretty deep: everyone (including a very suspicious studio exec played by Bela Lugosi, who is uncomfortable amid the snappy post-*Front Page* banter) eventually gets around to examining the footage of the killing for clues – decades before *Blow-Up* and *Blow Out*.

Meanwhile, the film delivers a stunningly rich and convincing portrait of daily life on a small Hollywood lot: the story takes us through real departments (lighting, props, etc) populated by real crew workers, while the head office is home to splenetic Eastern-Euro Jewish owners (“Oy!” Alexander Carr's stereotype trumpets at the news of the murder, “That's going to cost me a fortune!”), flunkies, egomaniac artistes, casting-couch-vet actresses and backstabbing middlemen. There are sneaky splats of golden hand-tinting by master tinter Gustav Brock, including projector beams, gunfire, scone lights and even the pivotally non-accidental burning of the important footage in the gate, long before *Two-Lane Blacktop*. Of course, the mystery itself, and Manners's rather silly interlocutor, are roughly sketched in (the script was co-written by HUAC blacklisted-to-be Gordon Kahn), and of the three stars inherited from the previous year's hit *Dracula*, only Van Sloan impresses with his savviness. But it remains a pre-Code standout, and a bewitching hunk of history.

**Disc:** Lovely HD mastering of Library of Congress-preserved elements, but with erratic image and sound quality, depending on the reel. Richard Harland Smith's commentary doesn't miss a Hollywood-history detail.

## DIARY OF A LOST GIRL

G.W. Pabst; Germany 1929; Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 115 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: piano score, booklet of essays, video essay

**Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson**

Three-quarters of the way through this grisly film, a patronising punter tells Louise Brooks's young prostitute Thymian that she's now a *Verlorene*, a lost girl. He has witnessed a shattering moment: Thymian's hypocritical father, a man in whom she had placed far too much faith, has spotted her working in a nightclub, and turned his back. But the diagnosis comes far too late. Thymian has been a lost girl from the start of this story, a motherless child beset by wolves. When she is raped by her father's repulsive deputy (Fritz Rasp) on the night of her confirmation, the scene is played out as slow as a sleepwalk, with an eerie inevitability. And from there,

Thymian plunges off the precipice, washing up in a brothel after a stint in a reformatory.

*Diary of a Lost Girl*, the famed second collaboration between Brooks and G.W. Pabst following 1929's *Pandora's Box*, went wandering itself for years after it was shredded by the censors. But a little of what was lost has been saved thanks to a restoration in the 1990s. And much here strikes close to the bone, with the scenes in the reform school as audacious as the juiciest pre-Code flick of the early 1930s, and terrifying too, the girls moving like galley slaves to the beat of the headmistress's gong.

Brooks's lead performance is just as captivating as in *Pandora's Box*, but there are greater subtleties here. And perversities too: Brooks later claimed that the rape scene was a seduction, with the child leading the man to bed, a reading that's extremely hard to come to terms with.

Jostled in a crowd, or in a row of uniformed reform-school girls, or even with her hair scraped back from her forehead, hers is a heartbreaker of a face. It's impossible to avert your eyes, or to do anything else but watch her fall.

**Disc:** This is the existing Masters of Cinema release with a booklet of essays, boosted on to Blu-ray in high-definition, and with the addition of a smart new video essay by David Cairns.

## THE GIRL HUNTERS

Roy Rowland; USA/ UK 1963; Scorpion Releasing/ Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 97 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: audio commentary with Mickey Spillane historian Max Allan Collins, interviews with Spillane and star Shirley Eaton, original trailer

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

Arthur Conan Doyle never donned the deerstalker of Sherlock Holmes. Scott Fitzgerald took a screen test but never got to play Gatsby.



The fall: *Diary of a Lost Girl*

And while it's been suggested that the only way Holden Caulfield would make it to the screen is if J.D. Salinger played the part himself, the window of opportunity for that would appear to have closed. But Mickey Spillane did portray his most famous literary creation, Mike Hammer PI, in front of the camera, and for that we may be bemused, if not precisely grateful.

With exteriors shot on the streets of Manhattan and interiors shot on flimsy-looking sets at the MGM-British studios at Borehamwood, the general air of seediness about *The Girl Hunters* is only increased by its black-and-white Panavision canvas. As Spillane points out in an interview included with this disc, his Hammer franchise was encountering fresh competition from another philandering, heat-packing, gadget-loving, spy-hunting misogynist-with-a-convertible – James Bond – and this drab, flat-footed piece of work from Roy Rowland wasn't about to stand up against the likes of

*Dr. No*. (Incidentally, future *Goldfinger* star Shirley Eaton is here as recipient of Hammer's flirtations: "I never hit dames, I always kick 'em.")

Spillane comes off as a pretty charming old guy in the above-mentioned interview, but this charisma is entirely lacking in his turn as Hammer – startlingly not his first screen outing, as he'd previously appeared in 1954's *Ring of Fear*. He sports a bristling jarhead flat-top and fills out a suit like he's wearing a cardboard box. He always seems to be sucking food out of his teeth, and is usually practising a meagre stare of the kind that one associates with abusive gym teachers and glowering stepdads.

The film's sole selling points are a few pieces of hard-boiled poetry ("Everything's as mundane as wood pie") and some gloomy sadism, as when Hammer nails an unconscious enemy's hand to the floor to keep him in place for his coming executioner. The definitive Hammer film will remain Robert Aldrich's 1955 *Kiss Me Deadly*, oft praised for subverting the character through satirical excess – though *The Girl Hunters* proves Spillane quite capable of satirising himself.

**Disc:** A fine new HD master captures all the dishwater greys of the original. UK viewers will particularly thrill to hear Spillane discuss his ingenious solution to the problem of on-set teatime.

## MOUCHETTE

Robert Bresson; France 1967; Artificial Eye/ Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 82 minutes; 1:66:1; Features: German making-of documentary

**Reviewed by Charlie Fox**

As intensely inhabited and woozily unreal as a sleepless night, Robert Bresson's *Mouchette* is one of the most haunting fables about adolescence you can find: a damp, skeletal and lonely film studying a juvenile misfit as she deals with an alcoholic father and a dying mother while caring for her baby brother, all in something like the desolate landscape of a medieval ghost story.

In a bleak premonition of all the sorrows to come, it begins with the slow death of a small bird, obliquely inaugurating the litany of traumas inflicted upon its titular heroine – played by startling unknown Nadine Nortier – in a collective attack of blank sadism that's intensified by Bresson's strategy of remaining elliptical and frosty. *Mouchette* is a wayward saint: half punk urchin in revolt against whatever she encounters, half bruised innocent adrift in the wilderness. Cruelties accumulate in a staccato sequence of punishing tableaux – a music lesson's choreographed savagery is especially painful – until the muted despair of the climax. Fragments of contemplation are interleaved, capturing a world of harrowed sensitivity: witness the breeze shivering through some inky trees or the deadened expressions of wandering drunks.

Like few other filmmakers, Bresson has a style that is hard to grasp: somewhat modernist but still raw, full of silence, anguish and moments of jaggedly ecstatic ardour. The religious ache is undeniable but taking it strictly as an austere parable on suffering means resisting how elusive it really feels. Nothing can account for the quivering strangeness conjured by little more than moonlight and



**Mouchette** As intensely inhabited and woozily unreal as a sleepless night, it is one of the most haunting fables about adolescence you can find





# UNDER THE INFLUENCE

*Withnail* was the heavy-drinking blueprint for many male flat-share sitcoms – but sober reappraisal reveals it to be full of darker themes

## WITHNAIL AND I – LIMITED EDITION

Bruce Robinson; UK 1987; Arrow Films/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 104 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentaries by Bruce Robinson and Kevin Jackson, four C4 'Withnail Weekend' documentaries, appreciation by Sam Bain, interviews with production designer Michael Pickwood, feature film 'How to Get Ahead in Advertising' (1989), theatrical trailers, book, deleted scenes

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

"How to account for the lasting charm of *Withnail and I*, that lament for a decade of freezing bedsitters, unreasoning excess, gigantic spliffs and young men congenitally incapable of growing up?" asked a giddily enthusiastic *Guardian* editorial in 2009. Putting the film's appeal down to an "extraordinary authenticity", it didn't mention the lukewarm reception that Bruce Robinson's blackly comic '60s postmortem received on its original, tardy release in 1988. "An aimless series of shaggy-chicken anecdotes" and "irretrievably self-indulgent" are some of the choicer barbs recorded in the hefty compendium of *Withnail* accompanying Arrow Films' covetable and notably well-contextualised restoration. As Vic Pratt's affectionate essay observes, the slow but steady ascent of *Withnail and I* to cult, then iconic, status was chiefly achieved through VHS viewings.

Set at the fag-end of the 1960s and shot in the 1980s with a mixture of cynicism and yearning for the hippie heyday, the film found its audience in the Britpop-era fascination with '60s sounds and aesthetics. It became a video karaoke party, complete with its own implausible drinking game, its ripe, ranting dialogue chanted like Monty Python sketches.

One of the pleasures of revisiting the film, sober and suitably appreciative of this sympathetic and sure-handed restoration, is to lay the cheery and persistent 'best mates get wrecked' reading to rest. For *Withnail and I* is a film of ugly looks and dark themes, full of London squalor and rural horrors, in which a decade is crashing as badly as its two heroes. Kevin Jackson's smart, entertaining and culturally wide-ranging commentary registers the strong notes of dread – of the end of youth, of failure, of deeply flawed friendships. It's a film studded with throat-drying threats, from Camden pub thug or prowling poacher to Uncle Monty's bullish seduction, and its settings are surprisingly sombre for a comedy. HandMade Films' executives found the first scenes, shot in the dingy Crow Crag farm, so scarily low-lit and laugh-free that the production nearly ended right there.

What infuses the film with verve and warmth are Robinson's carefully honed characters, especially Richard E. Grant's

selfish, self-destructive Withnail, drawing on English antecedents running from drunken mythomaniac Falstaff to the ever-slighted Hancock. Paul McGann's thoughtful actor-writer Marwood, vibrating with vulnerability and alert to the Lake District's beauty, draws a line back to the Romantic poets. In the absence of women (bar the "scrubbers" Withnail insults and the odd OAP), their central relationship has an intriguing ambiguity. Marwood, posed often in Caravaggio-style profile, dodges repeated sexual dangers with a rictus grin of fear, and issues of masculinity dog both of them. Whether you can detect a whiff of homophobia depends on your take on Uncle Monty, his predatory lunges undercut by his loneliness and his soft-hearted acceptance of the boys' 'relationship'. Robinson also generously dispenses exceptional verbal artistry, whether it's Withnail's 'yob baroque', Marwood's paranoid musings, Monty's mannered declamations or Danny the drug dealer's deadpan eulogy for the Summer of Love: "They're selling hippie wigs in Woolworths."


This very British, character-based humour finds grim laughs in poverty, hunger, alcoholism and potential overdose and the ill-tempered thuds of different generations and classes colliding with one another. So British, as Jackson points out, that its pleasures are usually lost in translation, with the exception of a small band

*This very British humour finds grim laughs in poverty, hunger, alcoholism and potential overdose*

of entranced Americans. Overlooked dialogue nuggets catch your ear on repeat viewings, such as Uncle Monty's wintry speculation, as evocative as a line of Larkin: "A cat, rain, Vim under the sink and both bars on."

The copious extras on Arrow's set usefully outline the famously autobiographical roots of the story and the precarious, novice-packed nature of the shoot. Sam Bain's generous appreciation confirms that *Withnail and I* is surely the starter dough of male flat-share sitcoms, from *Bottom* through *Men Behaving Badly* to *Peep Show*.


Immaculately presented in James White's careful restoration, graded with original DP Peter Hannan, the Blu-ray version restores detail, depth and sharpness to designer Michael Pickwood's artfully grubby London locations and the damp greens and bruised blues of the Lakes.

Included as an extra, Robinson's 1989 jeremiad against the marriage of politics and propaganda *How to Get Ahead in Advertising* has also been buffed up. A one-note satire as insistent as its amusingly over-elaborate yuppie decor, it transforms *Withnail*'s fruity tirades and rich misanthropy into bug-eyed haranguing monologues. Frank Collins's essay valiantly points up its virtues (a Kafkaesque look at masculine identity, a level of political rage about the hateful 1980s unusual in mainstream film comedies). But as Richard E. Grant points out in the extras, playing every scene as a rant "tanked it". There's a nice streak of Cronenbergian body-horror in its Thatcherite burgeoning boil, but Robinson's relentless bombast means that the film can't muster the truth-in-advertising gags that raise a snicker in *Crazy People*, let alone the headily didactic *Network*-style satire it's aiming for. 



Drifting into the arena of the unwell: *Withnail*, played by Richard E. Grant

# New releases

 rain during Mouchette's fearful prowling through the nocturnal forest, or explain the spell cast as she sings over the prone body of an epileptic poacher in a barn. *Mouchette* tears at your heart like a clutch of thorns.

**Disc:** The film has been restored to a pulse-quickenig lustre that's wholly unparalleled.

## STYLE WARS

Tony Silver; USA 1983; Public Art Films/Region B Blu-ray; 70 minutes; 4:3; Features: new 40-minute film comprised of unused footage, featurettes, audio commentary

**Reviewed by Ashley Clark**

*Style Wars*, which was filmed in New York in 1980-81 and premiered on PBS in 1983, was the first major documentary exegesis of hip-hop culture's three constituent pillars: graffiti, breaking and MC-ing. As it progresses, however, it ultimately lasers in on the daredevil train-taggers. *Style Wars* illustrates how graffiti-writing was fetishised by the artists, who were attracted by the elements of danger, while its clever title refers to the simultaneous battles between youth and establishment (NYC Mayor Koch, who dubs graffiti a "quality of life offence" and ramps up anti-graffiti spending, is the film's arch-villain); between concerned parents and rebellious children; and between various intra-subcultural rivalries.

Director/producer Tony Silver is rousinglly sympathetic to the youth throughout, and it's hard not to take sides, particularly in response to Koch's oleaginous bluster or the cringeworthy footage from anti-graffiti commercials starring, among others, *Fame* alumni Irene Cara and Gene Anthony Ray ("Use your head, or your voice, but don't waste your time making a mess!"). Silver also frequently locates poetry in the melding of artforms: one thrilling sequence sets a montage of vibrant, large-scale train art to Dion's swaggering 1961 rock 'n' roll hit 'The Wanderer' – an aural signifier of a previous generation's subculture.

*Style Wars* lasts only 70 minutes and one feels brought up short when it rattles to a conclusion: it's edited with propulsive rhythm by Sam Pollard, who would later collaborate with Spike Lee on another NYC classic, *Do the Right Thing* (1989).

**Disc:** A 2k transfer from the original 16mm is fine and clear but thankfully retains the original pop and grit, so central to the film's charm.

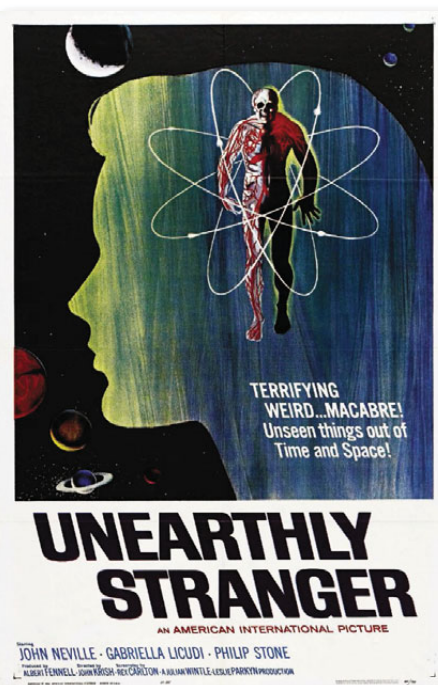
## THE COMPLETE JACQUES TATI

**JOUR DE FÊTE/MONSIEUR HULOT'S HOLIDAY/MON ONCLE/PLAYTIME/TRAFIC/PARADE**

Jacques Tati; France 1949-1974; Criterion Collection/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 86/87/116/124/97/89 minutes; various aspect ratios; Features: all seven Tati shorts (1934-78), two alternate versions of *Jour de Fête*, original 1953 theatrical release version of 'Monsieur Hulot's Holiday', version of 'Mon Oncle' created for English-speaking audiences, introductions by Terry Jones, archival video and audio interviews with Tati, documentaries, five visual essays and a classroom lecture by Stéphane Goudet, selected-scene commentaries on 'PlayTime' by Goudet, theatre director Jérôme Deschamps and critic Philip Kemp, interview with Michael Chion on Tati's sound design, 2006 interview with 'PlayTime' script supervisor Sylvette Baudrot, trailers, booklet

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

Jacques Tati's last completed feature, *Parade*, aired on Swedish television in 1973. In it, Tati plays



Close encounters: *Unearthly Stranger*

a sort of emcee to an evening of assorted circus acts, including tumblers, musical comedians and an uncooperative donkey that races in a circle while audience members, at an invitation from the stage, try to hop on and cling to its back, seemingly at no small risk to themselves. (In fact, the members of the 'audience' are plants one and all, an integrated element of the performance – very punk rock *avant la lettre*.)

Between spectacles, Tati steps in front of the footlights to perform a few pantomime routines – a flustered fisherman, an idle goalkeeper, a tennis player who slides in and out of slow-motion, a punch-drunk boxer. You can find the last bit of business, almost exactly as it appears here, in the 1936 comedy short *Soigne ton gauche*, in which a much younger Tati flings his long leg over the ropes of an imaginary ring, shadowboxes, then proceeds to throw wild haymakers that spin him on his axis. The fishing and the tennis shtick, meanwhile, are both dusted off from a 1967 short called *Cours du soir*, shot on the enormous international-style sets that Tati had constructed for his magnum opus, *PlayTime*. Directed by one Nicolas Ribowski, the short appears to be an excuse to set down these acts – his 'Impressions Sportives', which he had first trotted out on stage in the early 1930s – for posterity. Tati plays an acting instructor who stands in front of a class to break down pratfalls on the blackboard in terms of algebra, and such perfectionism hardly seems an exaggeration of Tati's actual practice – this, after all, was a man willing to work on the mechanics of the same gag for four decades.

All the above-mentioned films appear in new digital restorations on the Criterion Collection's *The Complete Jacques Tati* box-set. Indeed, I believe every single scrap of moving imagery that Tati was every involved with, save for his commercial for Lloyds Bank, is present and accounted for on this brick. One may view Tati's earliest appearance, as a henpecked husband

(married!?) in 1934's *On demande une brute*, entering the wrestling arena and improbably triumphing over a far larger bruiser, much as Chaplin and Keaton had done before him.

Tati, however, took a bit longer in figuring out his angle than the silent clowns he idolised. In 1935's *Gai dimanche*, playing one half of a pair of trampish grifters hoping to turn a profit by skimming tourists looking for an afternoon in the country, he tries on some Stan Laurel simpering without great success. It isn't until after the war, with the 1947 short *L'école des facteurs*, that Tati finds his feet – or rather learns how best to be amusing while failing to find them. His first directorial outing (and a rough draft for and immediate precursor to *Jour de fête*), the film finds Tati donning the moustache of a rural postman, his most successful creation until the raincoat-clad, muttering, shyly gallant Monsieur 'Oncle' Hulot.

The popular success of the Hulot character allowed Tati to indulge his world-building ambitions in earnest, cresting with the epochal accomplishment of *PlayTime*, in its way Tati's own 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, since both are works of mechanical perfection which question the fate of man in a new world of machines.

"Comedy is the summit of logic" was Tati's credo, quoted at the beginning of James Quandt's accompanying booklet essay. Among comics who strive to create the appearance of shaggy, haphazard anarchy, he is the rigorous, geometric French gardener.

**Disc:** The booklet is part of the staggering load of supplemental material included in Criterion's new box-set. The discs are the same transfers seen on the StudioCanal Region B box released earlier this year, but there is some switch-up in the special-features department. Indeed, the whole industry of Hulot experts is here present and accounted for.

## UNEARTHLY STRANGER

John Krish; UK 1964; Network/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 75 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: original theatrical trailer, image gallery, promotional material PDF

**Reviewed by Kim Newman**

Director John Krish's eccentric career spans impressionist 1950s documentaries, the redacted propaganda drama *Captured* (available on the BFI Flipside label), episodes of *The Avengers*, Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall* and the evangelically backed *Jesus Film*.

This claustrophobic, paranoid take on the *Quatermass* brand of boffin-versus-alien science fiction – like the contemporary horror film *Night of the Eagle* – depicts a battle of the sexes in which all men are stuffy, practical, short-sighted and terrified, while all women are unknowably alien, magical and purposeful. Dr Mark Davidson (John Neville), working on a project to realise space travel through mental projection, is pestered by a suave, sweetie-proferring security man (Patrick Newell) because a background check on Davidson's new wife Julia (Gabriella Licudi) suggests no such person exists. With scientists engaged in similar work around the world mysteriously murdered by unseen forces, it's plain that Julia is an alien spy. But the film's freshest angle is to have the unearthly



# Television

## THE GLITTERING PRIZES

BBC; UK 1976; Simply Media/Region 2 DVD;

Certificate 15; 465 minutes; 4:3

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

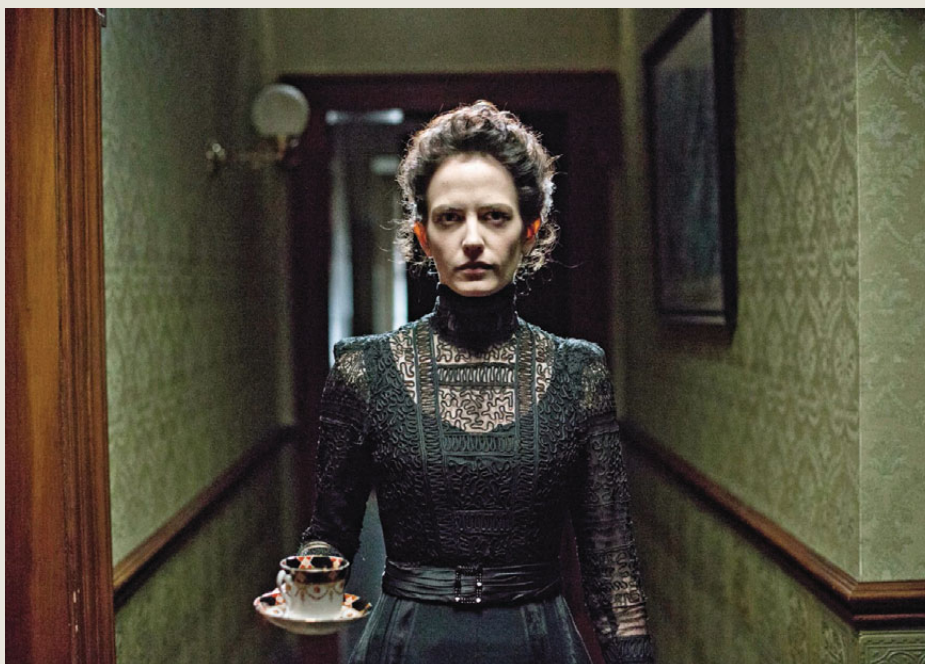
It is a mysterious fact that *The Glittering Prizes* has not been repeated on British television since it was first broadcast, despite the adoration lavished on it by critics at the time – Clive James, in *The Observer*, was a notable exception. Nearly 40 years on, it is not hard to guess reasons why a repeat might not have seemed a good idea – the clunky handling of race, dialogue that seemed dazzling at the time but has now faded and brittle – but in some ways it looks better than it did.

Frederic Raphael's six plays follow a group of Cambridge students from the high spirits and high ambitions of undergraduate days in the mid-50s through early success (in the arts, the media and academe – other sectors of the economy get only walk-on parts) to midlife crises, domestic failures and professional disappointment in the 1970s. The irony of the title is blatant but deceptive: the dramatis personae may be doomed to disillusionment, but disillusionment itself seems rather appealing, a by-product of intelligence, sensitivity and all-round charisma.

This is partly a problem of casting: as Adam Morris, the Raphael-surrogate at the heart of the drama, Tom Conti is brilliant, convincingly embodying Adam from schoolboy to middle-aged novelist while lending warmth and self-deprecating charm to the wordy, clever dialogue. Without him, Adam's prickliness, compulsive joking and self-regard might seem unbearable; but that charm obscures the undercurrent of irony and self-loathing – the way cleverness constantly punctures itself, the awareness that cleverness may not be the thing that gets one through life.

And the cleverness is inescapable. One problem with the drama is that all the men have the same sort of shallow, jousting intelligence, with the same humour and the same crude, jokey lust (though Nigel Havers is delightfully fey as the gay character: the sense of tokenism is accentuated by the way his conviction for indecency is whisked on and off stage). Meanwhile the women are, by and large, shrewder and warmer, which is perhaps some consolation for the fact that they get fewer opportunities to act, functioning largely as recipients of the men's comic routines and chat-up lines. One exception is Emily Richard, who, after starting as one of the nicest and cleverest characters, has a grimly comic scene as an unabashed alcoholic. And Barbara Kellerman, as Adam's wife, is an excellent foil to Conti.

It's startling to observe the way Raphael's characters speak about women, though: even in the 1970s, it must have been unusual for a university teacher to remark on a female student's nipples and for her to respond with a smirk – this is in 'An Academic Life', which is also the episode where Raphael fumbles ineffectively around race. Despite that, it's one of the most interesting of the plays, with Dinsdale Landen – who on television was rarely allowed to be much more than a *farceur* – putting on an outstanding turn as a self-loathing (there we go again) Marxist sociologist at a plate-glass university.



## Penny Dreadful A contribution to the tradition of the syncretic monster story that gave us 'Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man'

The other episode that makes a strong impression is 'A Country Life', which revolves around Dan (Malcolm Stoddard), at university the great actor of his generation, and his wife Joyce (Angela Down): they have settled into deliberate rural obscurity, eschewing London and ambition – he has a job teaching juvenile delinquents, she looks after the children. Their idyll is exploded by the arrival of her old Cambridge boyfriend, who is father of her eldest child and now a TV personality (he's played by the Australian actor John Gregg – a passing resemblance to Clive James may account for the negative review). Stoddard has an impressive, contained violence and the whole episode makes the point nicely that, whatever else they lack, glittering prizes do at least glitter. **Disc:** OK transfer, no extras. Would an interview or a bit of commentary have been too much to ask?

### PENNY DREADFUL

USA 2014; Showtime/Paramount/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 418 minutes; 1:78:1. Features: short documentaries, featurettes, production blogs

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

*Penny Dreadful* – a misleading title for something that clearly cost vast amounts of money and is perfectly adequate – is a contribution to the tradition of the syncretic monster story that gave us *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.

In late-Victorian London, Timothy Dalton's gentleman explorer and his tarot-reading assistant Eva Green enlist the help of an American sharpshooter – Josh Hartnett – to go hunting unfamiliar blood-drinking creatures who are involved in the disappearance of his

daughter. Along the way, they fall in with a brilliant young scientist called Dr Frankenstein, a haematologist called Van Helsing and a pretty young gentleman called Dorian Gray; there's also some post-Lovecraft gobbledygook about elder gods and the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and at one point, when Green is possessed by an evil spirit, an apparent homage to *Ghostbusters*.

Even if originality is not this show's strong suit, its credentials are impressive: script by John Logan (*Skyfall*), produced for the Showtime network by Sam Mendes's company, and a terrific cast – as well as Green and Dalton, both adding depth of feeling to dialogue that isn't always worthy of their efforts, Harry Treadaway is an attractively nervy, arrogant Frankenstein, Rory Kinnear has pathos and menace as his Creature, and there are gorgeous cameos by Simon Russell Beale as a finicky Egyptologist and Helen McCrory as a spiritualist.

But like Frankenstein's creature, the series is less than the sum of its parts. Over seven hours, you need character development rather than simple thickening of the plot. More seriously, it misunderstands the genre it is pastiching – gothic is a genre of repression, sublimation, hypocrisy; everybody in this Victorian London lets it all hang out. Gentlewomen buy their own drinks in bars, class distinctions are barely enforced and everybody shags everybody else, usually standing up. In this free-and-easy society, not enough is at stake – the undead daughter and some nonsense about evil conquering the world are just overblown macguffins.

**Disc:** A clean transfer but the accompanying featurettes are unimpressive. The 'production blogs' are essentially very brief, very basic primers on the cultural context of gothic fiction. **S**

# New releases

stranger do a poor job of impersonating a human – she calmly pulls a hot Le Creuset from the oven without gloves. She is, moreover, racked with unhappiness at the isolation she feels on this planet and in her marriage. In an unsettling reversal of *Village of the Damned*, she looks yearningly at a noisy playground and is emotionally devastated when children sense her difference and silently back away from her.

The stiff Neville and pretty-placid Licudi are perfectly cast, and there are vivid supporting turns from Philip Stone and Warren Mitchell as scientists and an eyebrow-arching Jean Marsh as a secretary plainly ready to run the planet.

**Disc:** Network's Blu-ray shows off the minimalist monochrome look – empty London streets, a low-budget necessity, are sharply threatening (a DVD is also available).

## VERDUN, LOOKING AT HISTORY

Léon Poirier; France 1928; Kino Lorber/Region 0 NTSC; 151 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: three documentary shorts

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

Outside of France a completely forgotten epic undertaking from silent cinema's halcyon days, this fastidious recreation of the Battle of Verdun is a different kind of interbellum film, one that hews so close to the facts of military history that it seamlessly intercuts archival footage with new material shot in the region and on the old battlefields. Thus, it features actual French and German military leaders in supporting roles, captured exactly on location at the moment in the timeline the film is tracking. Who and what was where and when is the priority, and the authenticity reminds one most of Peter Watkins's *Culloden* (1964). Director Léon Poirier was clever enough to cut famous footage of world leaders with matching answer shots featuring his fictional characters, and the effect is seamless.

However much it may have borrowed from Abel Gance (double exposures, metaphor-laden montages, etc), Poirier's movie strives to balance a handful of human stories (primarily fresh-faced French soldier Albert Préjean's trial by fire) with behind-the-scenes re-enactments of the Allied and Axis leaders strategising and the nitty-gritty of the manoeuvres themselves, heavily augmented with animated maps and scenes in which the devastated terrain gets demolished all over again by the filmmakers' load of explosives. (Often the actors, almost all of whom were real Great War veterans, are so close to the blasts that you're not sure it isn't archival, and real.)

There's room in *Verdun*'s expansive running time for Antonin Artaud (in a small role as the stay-at-home 'intellectual', disdainful of conflict) and plenty of poetic asides, including a haunting passage in which Préjean's trench-trapped grunt dreams that his ghost returns home and confronts his grieving family. But the chess-play of the martial war-gaming remains the film's *raison d'être*, and Poirier may come off as a war geek on a mission, especially since the film is hardly anti-war, as was the post-WWI fashion, but nakedly patriotic. But he was, in fact, an experienced maker of middlebrow entertainments; this was his 12th feature in 15 years, followed by adaptations of Balzac and Chateaubriand and several films about Africa.



It's a battlefield: *Verdun, Looking at History*

Rarely seen for decades, and then only in an edited version reissued in 1931, Poirier's mega-project was actually achieved on a modest budget, and it shows: during the climactic melee, we stay low in the trenches a good deal of the time.

**Disc:** Recently restored by the Cinémathèque de Toulouse, the film meshes real wartime images with recreations in a rather amazing way. Three supplemental docs examine Poirier's achievements and the battle itself.

## THE VISITOR

Giulio Paradisi; Italy 1979; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 108 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: interviews, booklet

**Reviewed by James Blackford**

Italian genre cinema has certain distinctive characteristics: stylistic excess, bravura set pieces, playing fast and loose with plausibility and narrative cohesion – and the unashamed apeing of bigger-budgeted Hollywood films. The best Italian genre films (the work of Mario Bava or Sergio Leone, for example) employ this approach to good effect, ironically reappropriating and exaggerating the themes, iconography and visual style of American and British genre movies so as to become a mode of critical, reflexive cinema themselves. However, when pushed too far, this pick-and-mix approach can also make for shallow, empty filmmaking, as in the case of the spaghetti sci-fi/horror car crash *The Visitor*, a film that wildly mashes up bits and bobs nicked from *The Exorcist*, *Damien: Omen II*, *The Birds* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* into a virtually meaningless mélange.

*The Visitor* was produced, and based on an idea by, Ovidio G. Assonitis, who had achieved some commercial success in the US with the *Exorcist* rip-off *Beyond the Door* (1974) and the *Jaws* clone *Tentacles* (1977), and its plot is a jumble of half-baked ideas. John Huston stars as Jerzy Colsowicz, a Doctor Who-style time-traveller who, along with a bleach-blond celestial Christ-like figure (Franco Nero), does battle with a girl called Katy Collins (Paige Connor), the earthly embodiment of an intergalactic evil force known as Sateen. Bestowed with telekinetic powers, the eight-year-old Katy is also sought by a secret society that wants to harness her abilities for devilish ends.

Like many Italian films of its ilk, *The Visitor* has stylish cinematography and some expertly crafted set pieces. These include a hallucinatory, snow-swept prologue that sees the two main antagonists in a pan-dimensional

face-off; Glenn Ford having his eyes pecked out by crows while speeding down a highway; and even a violent ice-skating confrontation that climaxes with a Peckinpah-style slow-motion defenestration. As with Assonitis's *Beyond the Door*, Franco Micalizzi provides an outrageously funky if rather incongruous score. But none of this adds up to a satisfying whole simply because *The Visitor*'s script awkwardly bolts extravagant set pieces together with incompatible scenes of tedious dialogue and empty allusions to other, better films.

**Disc:** Excellent new high-definition transfer.

## WELCOME TO NEW YORK

Abel Ferrara; USA 2014; Spirit Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 125 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: alternate version, trailer

**Reviewed by Brad Stevens**

On the surface, Abel Ferrara appears to have undergone a major transformation from exploitation filmmaker to arthouse auteur. Yet structurally, stylistically and thematically, his latest film, *Welcome to New York*, has much in common with *The Driller Killer* (1979) and *Ms. 45* (1981). Gérard Depardieu, evoking memories of his 1970s collaborations with Marco Ferreri, stars as a French financier named Devereaux – a thinly disguised Dominique Strauss-Kahn – who is arrested in New York after sexually assaulting a maid. Ferrara rigorously resists the complementary temptations of either whitewashing his protagonist or expressing contempt for him; Devereaux's behaviour is inexcusable but he remains nonetheless recognisably human and thus worthy of sympathy.

As so often in Ferrara, there is an emphasis on the relationship between identity and performance. "Do you know who I am?" Devereaux asks the maid. Later, a lawyer tells Devereaux's wife Simone (Jacqueline Bisset): "It ain't reality. It's a play. You need to play a part." Devereaux's crisis of identity (he insists he is incapable of feeling) is explicitly linked with the excesses of contemporary capitalism, making the point that, in a world where social relations are defined by the circulation of money, it is inevitable that reality, sexuality, emotion and even justice will ultimately be determined by financial concerns.

**Disc:** The Blu-ray boasts a flawless transfer of the 125-minute director's cut (identical to the version shown in UK cinemas, though a disclaimer has been added). The main extra (not on the standard DVD) is an 'alternate version', which turns out to be the 109-minute edition prepared without Ferrara's participation for US release. Aside from truncating the sexually explicit material, this variant eliminates several scenes for no apparent reason, restores others from the cutting-room floor, and repositions Devereaux's assault as a flashback seen from the maid's perspective. Devereaux's guilt is thus rendered ambiguous, and his claims of innocence now seem quite plausible, making this a completely different film. The disc also includes a trailer with some unique footage, notably a shot of Devereaux being asked why he does "all this fucking" and responding, "What do you prefer? Playing golf?"



# Lost and found

## LE PETIT PRINCE A DIT

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

This sensitive tale of divorced parents and their perilously ill daughter is one of the great French films about childhood tragedy

**Reviewed by Neil Sinyard**

When I first saw Christine Pascal's *Le Petit Prince a dit* (1992) some 20 years ago, I was so moved that I missed its next (and final) showing, because its poignancy was still resonating so powerfully in my mind. I'll catch up with it again later, I thought. I'm still waiting. On my list of favourite movies awaiting a proper DVD and Blu-ray release, this has occupied top spot for a long time.

The subject matter could hardly be less enticing, concerning a ten-year-old girl who is diagnosed as having an inoperable brain tumour and given only a short time to live. Yet in Pascal's handling of it all dangers of mawkishness or morbidity are scrupulously avoided. For one thing, father (Richard Berry) and mother (Anémone) are not happily married but happily divorced, which is a piquant complication. Also, the girl, Violette (Marie Kleiber), is not cuddly cute but plump and petulant, i.e. real. And the handling of the revelation of her illness is satisfyingly oblique. Her scientist father accidentally discovers it through an overheard conversation and his scrutiny of a scanner screen in a cold hospital room. Her actress mother learns about it midway through rehearsing an opera in Milan. Life has a way of pulling the rug from under your feet when you are least expecting it. When the father has to explain her illness to the girl, he does it by diagram and behind dark glasses: evasion takes a while to give way to emotion. He will eventually snatch her from the examining table and take her to visit her mother in Milan and then to their family home in Provence, believing that prolonging the child's life for two more years of painful surgery will be less beneficial than a joyful holiday break and perhaps the illusion that father and mother have been reunited.

The mid-section of the film makes superb use of its locations. The off-season hotels and the open roads with their deceptive promise of freedom gather a momentum of gentle melancholy. During the final scenes a stray dog that Violette has adopted on their travels goes missing; the father is distracted as he eases Violette's stepmother out of their cottage so that the parents can be together for what could be the girl's final hours; the mother adopts a tone of strenuous cheerfulness; Violette becomes a bit exasperating. Everything builds to the concluding moments where the girl is about to fall asleep, with her head hurting terribly. The father grips her pillow so tightly that his knuckles show. A mercy killing, if not enacted, is surely being contemplated, at which point the film mercifully stops.

The performances are all superb, and Bruno Coulais's lovely score put me in mind of Ravel



Playing happy families: Anémone and Richard Berry in *Le Petit Prince a dit*

*All dangers of mawkishness are scrupulously avoided... It is the beauty that lingers in the mind more than the sadness*

at his most gravely beautiful. One particular image has stayed with me: the moment when a butterfly lands almost caressingly on Violette's forehead while she is asleep in the country and then flies away. It is as if Nature has come to bless a departing spirit.

### WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



**'Emphasis is more on character exploration than plot extrapolation, and it is none the worse for it, when one considers the saccharine possibilities of the storyline... It is the sly circumnavigation of the sentimental that allows it to deal with the self-consciousness that comes with a subject such as this... The film's resolute lack of sentimentality is crystallised in the shot of Adam's knuckles whitening as he kneads a pillow taken from his daughter's bed – as much an image of mercy-killing passion as of grief.'**

**Chris Darke** 'Sight & Sound', May 1994

Two years or so after seeing the film, I read with deep sadness and shock that Christine Pascal had committed suicide at the age of 42 by throwing herself out of the window of a private hospital near Paris, where she was being treated for severe depression. (Her psychiatrist was later fined and imprisoned for ignoring the danger signs and not ensuring her safety and protection.) Not having seen her other films as writer/director, I remember her mostly through her career as an actress, particularly in five fine films she did for Bertrand Tavernier; and I think of her as someone who could, like her one-time flatmates Isabelle Huppert and Isabelle Adjani, have become one of the leading lights of post-1970s French cinema. She is extraordinary as one of the sisters in Andrzej Wajda's exquisite *Young Ladies of Wilko* (1979), her acting of the young woman's emotional breakdown going further than mere romantic disappointment: it is more suggestive of someone sustaining an emotional blow that a lifetime will not heal.

That kind of hypersensitivity permeates *Le Petit Prince a dit*, which for me belongs with René Clément's *Jeux interdits* and Louis Malle's *Au revoir les enfants* as one of the great French films about the tragedies that can befall children. Yet as with Christine Pascal, so with the film: it is the beauty that lingers in the memory more than the sadness. The last time I checked, the sole available DVD was a single French-only copy, costing more than £50. The film should surely be part of a full retrospective set that commemorates and celebrates the career of this remarkably talented artist. I am ready for my second viewing now.

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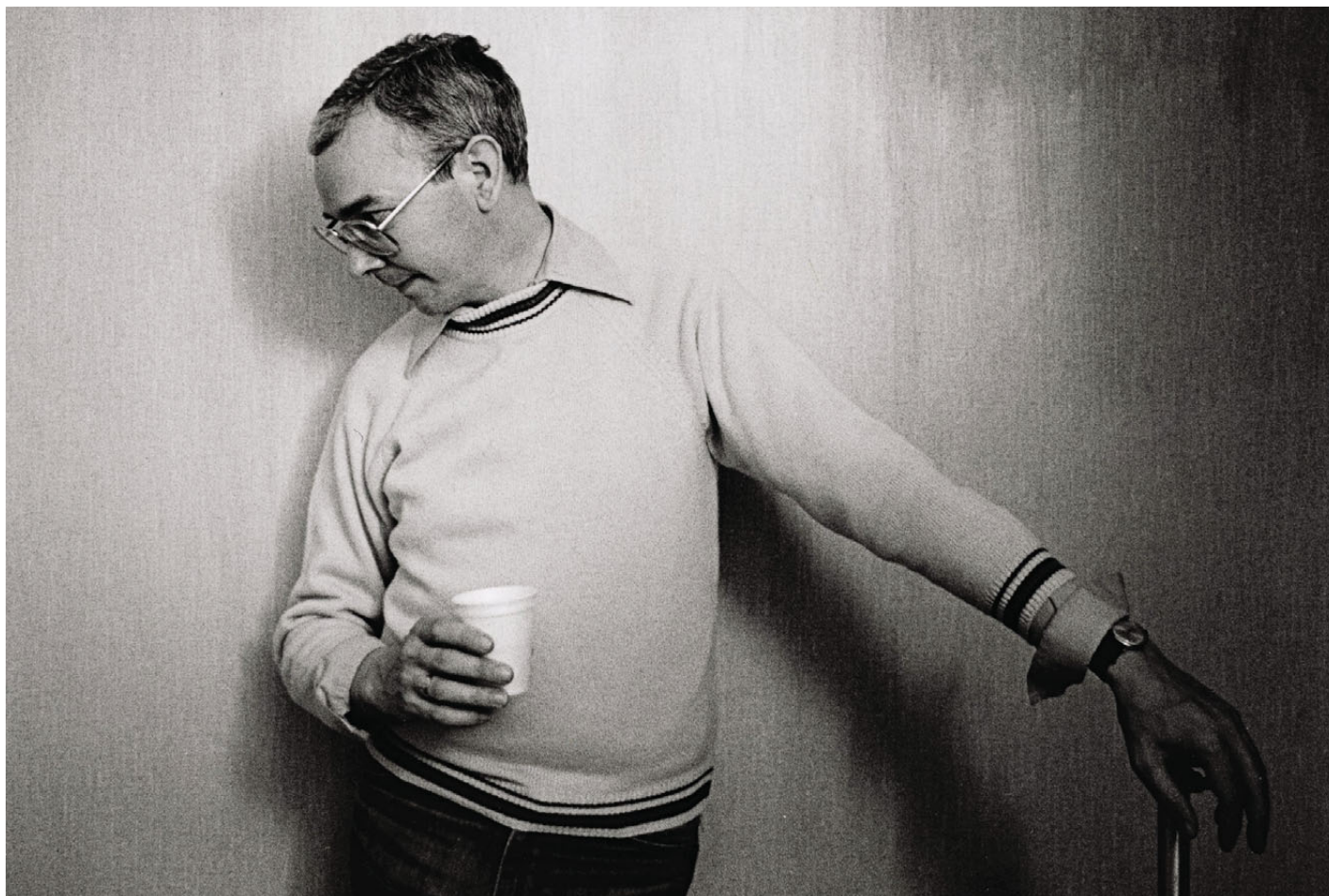
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Once upon a time in the North-West: Terence Davies pictured during the filming of *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988)

## IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME

### TERENCE DAVIES

By Michael Koresky, University of Illinois Press, 168pp, \$22, ISBN 9780252080210

#### Reviewed by Philip French

Michael Koresky, a staff writer for the American video distribution company The Criterion Collection, regards Terence Davies's work as "one of the richest, most idiosyncratic, and arrestingly experimental bodies of work put out by a narrative filmmaker", and his monograph in the University of Illinois Contemporary Film Directors series is both informative and insightful. An unusual life in many ways, it's the progress of a gay working-class Catholic autodidact from boyhood cinephile obsessed with popular, mainly Hollywood, movies through to an adult arthouse cineaste of worldwide renown. Born in Liverpool in 1945, Davies followed his unhappy education in parochial schools with a decade of frustrating white-collar clerical jobs before studying

drama and then attending the National Film School. Forty years of filmmaking have so far resulted in a small, exquisite *oeuvre*, quite the equal, as Koresky claims, of Terrence Malick's, though much less publicised.

He began with a low-budget autobiographical trilogy of short films (*Children*, *Madonna and Child*, *Death and Transfiguration*) following a guilt-ridden gay working-class Liverpudlian from painful childhood to isolated old age. Made in black and white over some eight years, this austere work was first shown in its entirety at the 1983 Edinburgh Festival. In my initial review from Scotland I called him "a filmmaker of exceptional gifts" and noted resemblances to late Samuel Beckett, the early Catholic novels of Brian Moore and Bill Douglas's autobiographical trilogy, another BFI Production Board project of the time. A year, however, passed before its very limited release at the ICA Cinema in London. This was followed by the Technicolor diptych *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), made in discrete halves two years apart. More specifically autobiographical, it's set in the 40s and 50s

and looks at the violent treatment of Davies's long-suffering mother at the hands of his brutal, psychotic father through the eyes of two elder sisters and a brother. It moves between ebullience and despair, endurance and acceptance.

Koresky writes in great detail about the fastidious, elliptical way Davies evokes the wartime Blitz (a term he explains for his American audience) and post-war Liverpool, and about the way he plays with time in a manner influenced by a favourite work of his, T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Its epigraph might well be taken from that poem: "Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future/ And time future contained in time past/ If all time is eternally present/ All time is unredeemable." One understands that Davies sees films as forms of poems. Koresky is also good on Davies's astute use of music, both classical and popular. In *Distant Voices* the a cappella renditions of popular Tin Pan Alley songs at family gatherings draw together the community and express what they cannot otherwise articulate. Koresky notes that the quotations of Hollywood numbers first occur

when Doris Day's 'It All Depends on You' (from *Love Me or Leave Me* in 1955) accompanies the mother's funeral in the central section of his early trilogy and is later employed to magnificent effect in *Distant Voices* when, with ambiguous irony, Ella Fitzgerald sings 'Taking a Chance on Love' over the father's attack on the mother.

*Distant Voices, Still Lives* may come to be seen as Davies's greatest film, but it cannot be considered without the even more intensely autobiographical *The Long Day Closes* (1992), in which Davies's 11-year-old alter ego Bud discovers his latent homosexuality and begins to reject his Catholicism in the mid-1950s. In a sense this more positive film completes a trilogy, though we're told Davies regards his next film, *The Neon Bible* (1994), a period piece set in the American Deep South, as constituting along with the preceding three pictures what he calls "my modest version of the *Four Quartets*". The only other directly autobiographical work is *Of Time and the City* (2008), Davies's documentary on the sad decline of his home town, made up largely of black-and-white found footage, and it contains what Koresky regards as one of the outstanding sequences of recent cinema, Peggy Lee's version of 'The Folks Who Live on the Hill' played with devastating poignancy over the destruction of Liverpool's slums.

*Terence Davies's 40 years of filmmaking have so far resulted in a small, exquisite oeuvre, quite the equal of Terrence Malick's*

Davies's remaining films – his adaptation of two minor classics, Edith Wharton's 1905 novel *The House of Mirth* (2000) and Terence Rattigan's 1952 play *The Deep Blue Sea* (2011) – are more seemingly conventional. Both are portraits of upper-middle-class women fighting losing battles when breaking the unwritten laws of their snobbish, repressive class-bound societies. They're studies in stoicism, a key theme in Davies's work, and show Davies's ability to help shape complex performances. As Koresky demonstrates, these are characteristic pictures that no one else but Davies could have made.

Koresky is well informed about and sympathetic to the changing British context in which Davies has worked – so much so that one is suddenly taken aback to find he believes that Keith Waterhouse's Billy Liar "has a stultifying job as a clerk in a grim London office". In fact John Schlesinger's crucial film turns on Billy's inability to move south from Yorkshire. And I find unconvincing Koresky's determination throughout the book to force his subject into the Procrustean bed of B. Ruby Rich's aggressively assertive New Queer Cinema. "I've always had the greatest difficulty accepting being gay," the articulate Davies tells Koresky. "I don't like the gay scene at all." To pigeonhole him as a 'queer auteur' (in itself an appropriative term) is to diminish the universality of his achievement and to impose limits on his identity. ☹

## BE SAND, NOT OIL

### The Life and Work of Amos Vogel

Edited by Paul Cronin,  
FilmmuseumSynema Publications,  
268 pp. £22.50, ISBN 9783901644597

#### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

"It is therefore the triumph, the irony and the inevitable fate of the subversive creator, as he succeeds, to supersede himself, for at the moment of victory, he is already dated."

The above comes from the final chapter of Amos Vogel's most famous accomplishment and testament, his 1974 book *Film as a Subversive Art*. That chapter, 'The Eternal Subversion', which offers a prescription for art as eternal struggle, now appears as the penultimate section of a new volume, *Be Sand, Not Oil* – the title comes from an excerpt of a 1950 poem by Günter Eich ("Be uncomfortable/ Be sand, not oil in the machinery of the world"), which Vogel kept above his desk for years, a reminder to keep agitating and be a burr under the saddle of smug self-satisfaction.

*Be Sand, Not Oil* collects Vogel's writing, much of it previously unpublished, as well as essays about Vogel's various incarnations as critic, programmer (for New York City's membership-financed cine-club Cinema 16, and for the first incarnation of the New York Film Festival), and academic (most significantly at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication in Philadelphia).

The book is copiously illustrated, as is typical of Austria's FilmmuseumSynema Publications. The juvenilia in the early chapters are crucial to understanding Vogel's lifelong anti-authoritarianism, for they are fragments of the youth of a Jewish boy from a Zionist-socialist family living in a Vienna that was shortly to be overrun by Hitler. In this light Vogel's childhood doodles and his membership card to an ice-skating club take on a touching and pathetic aspect.

For Vogel, however, to sentimentalise history was of no use. "We cannot live in the past... THE WILL TO CHANGE OURSELVES, the urge to become better and better, is much more important." This is Vogel as a teen after his family had emigrated to the US, writing for the magazine of Habersham College, and displaying the zeal



An unquiet conscience: Amos Vogel

and decency that typified the early kibbutzniks – though he would soon abandon his dream of Israel over the question of Arab displacement and decide to stay in the US. It's quoted in an essay called 'Politics Make the Man' by editor Paul Cronin, which explores the role of Vogel's social-political conscience through his life. The piece contains excerpts from Vogel's recollections of the Nazi period, as well as anti-clerical, anti-bourgeois German-language poetry written during his adolescence, and opinion pieces published during and after the war, harshly critical of America and Britain's stances on Jewish immigration.

Chapters by contributors offering essays on the major movements of Vogel's career are followed by reproductions of related documents and pieces of his writing from, or referring to, the period in question. Scott MacDonald writes on Vogel's New York-based film society Cinema 16 (1947-63), and of his eclectic programming tastes, mixing avant-garde, arthouse, documentary and even scientific films. Tom Yoshikami discusses Vogel's role in creating the New York Film Festival, which ended when he felt bureaucratic and corporate forces encroaching on his freedom. (A letter from Vogel to Susan Sontag, a member of the selection committee, protests the decision to make Paul Mazursky's *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* the opening night film of the 1969 festival.) Michael Chaiken's chapter describes Vogel's move to academia, while a previously unpublished 1993 interview with Bill Nichols sheds light on Vogel's struggle for the soul of the avant-garde with Jonas Mekas.

Vogel's own writings are of most interest as historical documents, for his contribution to film culture, while enormous, cannot be limited to belle-lettres – as MacDonald acknowledges in his appreciation of *Film as a Subversive Art*, that book's accomplishment is as much graphic as literary. I did enjoy Vogel on Thierry Zéno's *Des Morts (of the Dead)*, a film still waiting to be sufficiently recognised, as well as his eulogy for the poet and champion of the avant-garde Parker Tyler – although he seems to bend Tyler's perspective on 'mainstream' Hollywood narrative film to resemble his own. (I feel justified in this use of scare quotes, as Vogel is addicted to them.) Vogel's analyses of the reactionary subtexts at work in *The Exorcist* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* show that his views on "how escapist-entertainment masks ideological re-affirmations of dominant social value systems" held fast through his life – the language of these pieces is quite close to that of a 1947 paper for a class at The New School for Social Research titled 'The Ideals of the American Middle Class in U.S. Movies', which is also included.

"Gatekeepers exist to be overthrown," Vogel says to Nichols – and, as a Marxist with a firm grasp on the dialectic, he understood that defining dichotomies other than those he'd arranged his life around would come into being. If the Manichean binary between avant-garde and mainstream that runs through Vogel's writing has fallen out of favour, his call to rebellion has never taken on a quaint aspect, and *Be Sand, Not Oil* is an agitating encounter with an unquiet conscience, a rough surface against which we would do well to test our complacency. ☹



## HOU HSIAO-HSIEN

Edited by Richard I. Suchenski,  
FilmmuseumSyneema Publications,  
272pp, £22.50, ISBN 9783901644580

### Reviewed by Brad Stevens

I recently developed an extremely profitable obsession with Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1996), watching it five times in the course of a single week. What these multiple screenings revealed was not hitherto unperceived areas of the frame (as, for example in Tati), nor new possibilities of thematic interpretation, but rather those details of narrative construction and interpersonal relationship that most filmmakers clarify as a matter of course. It was only after my third viewing that I began to comprehend the not particularly complicated plot, understood the professional or familial ties that connected the characters, and realised why these characters were travelling to particular places.

Although Hou is widely considered to be among the greatest living practitioners of cinema, he is primarily concerned with destroying the barrier between cinema and reality. Watching his films is like sitting in a bar observing the interactions of unfamiliar individuals. These people will not tell us who they are, how they relate to each other, or what kind of lives they lead, but if we watch them attentively, we will be able to work out a surprising amount. If films that refuse all didacticism can be said to have a 'point',

it is surely that we need to look closer, to look more generously, to avoid preconceptions and pay attention to everything, rather than attempting to separate 'significant' details from 'insignificant' ones. In Hou's world, every detail is important, the barely visible extra at the frame's rear as deserving of our attention as the ostensible 'stars'.

Such an approach runs counter to the usual practices of filmic analysis, which may explain why, despite widespread admiration, there have been relatively few English-language studies of Hou. Fortunately, what has appeared is of an impressively high quality; Bérénice Reynaud's superb BFI Modern Classics monograph on *A City of Sadness* (1989) and James Udden's extremely useful *No Man an Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-Hsien*. Now comes this multi-authored anthology from the Austrian Film Museum, containing a mostly new selection of essays and interviews, including several with Hou's collaborators. This approach is particularly suited to a filmmaker of such complexity, and Richard I. Suchenski has assembled a well-balanced mixture of academic and cinephilic texts. Those authors who belong to the latter school often place a pleasing emphasis on marginalia – Kent Jones is particularly good on Hou's four-minute contribution to *Chacun son cinéma* (2007) – neatly matching the director's own interest in marginal lives. Other writers meticulously position Hou in the context of Chinese aesthetics, politics and history, and virtually every piece sends one back to the work equipped with fresh tools for understanding it.

Although Hou has been directing for more than three decades, it is still too soon to talk about Hou



Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Goodbye South, Goodbye*

criticism (in the way one talks about Hitchcock or Godard criticism), and many of the texts collected here have a tentative feeling, as if their authors were aware of exploring relatively uncharted territory. The lamentable inaccessibility of Hou's earlier masterpieces, many of which are not on DVD, inevitably makes undertaking a project such as this a leap of faith, and the dismal quality of the available materials has left its traces on Suchenski's book; the images it reproduces from *The Puppetmaster* (1993) are clearly taken from Fox-Lorber's notorious Region 1 disc, which crops the frame to 1.33:1, significantly distorting and misrepresenting the 1.85 compositions. But such flaws demonstrate how important it is that Hou's *oeuvre* be treated with greater respect. His emphasis may be on marginality, but contemporary film culture cannot afford to treat Hou Hsiao-Hsien as a marginal figure. Ⓢ

## NATIONALISM AND THE CINEMA IN FRANCE

### Political Mythologies and Film Events, 1945-1995

By Hugo Frey, Berghahn Books, 242pp, hardback, £60, ISBN 9781782383659

### Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

The word 'nationalism' in the title of this book, as opposed to the more neutral 'national identity', gives a clue to Hugo Frey's take on his topic. His aim is to "tease out and relocalize analysis of the cinema around French politics of nationalism" between 1945 and 1995. Clearly, for Frey these have a strong right-wing and exclusionary slant. After exploring "patriotic sub-texts" in films about film, the search for national unity through history, and narratives of 'chic' modernity, the author examines, in a crescendo of objectionableness: anti-Americanism, neocolonial attitudes, anti-Semitism and the extreme Right.

The book is stronger when it offers original analyses (*Un homme et une femme*, the Claude Autant-Lara 'affair', the politics of Michel Audiard, and generally the chapter on anti-Semitism) or brings a new perspective on well-known films, such as the very convincing analysis of the nationalistic stance in Truffaut's *Day for Night*. It is weaker when discussing films about the Resistance, anti-Americanism – where it competes with abundant scholarship – or already heavily explored films such as *The Battle of Algiers*.

While Frey claims the right to selectiveness, the privileging of reactionary discourses of the Right is too partial. While he does briefly

mention powerful counter-discourses, the focus remains negative, for instance singling out Gérard Blain's racist *Pierre et Djamil* while ignoring the more progressive, and flourishing, *cinéma beur* of the time. Similarly the chapter on anti-Semitism barely mentions *Shoah*. Frey's approach is also sometimes in danger of reducing films to political ciphers, for instance berating the romantic melodrama *Un homme et une femme* (1966) for not showing shanty towns and "gloss[ing] over France's history as a colonial world power". While Anti-Americanism indeed

*The author examines, in a crescendo of objectionableness: anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism and the extreme Right*

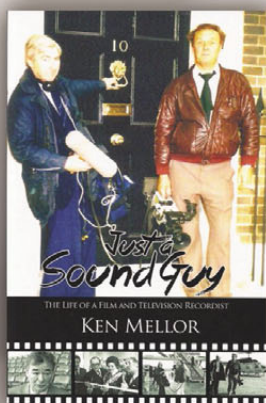
was rife during the GATT negotiations in the early 90s, the conclusion that "Encouraged by the government, many French men and women considered it a patriotic duty to watch *Germinal*" treats the film like propaganda under dictatorship; might not the audience simply have been attracted by the combination of Emile Zola, Claude Berri and Gérard Depardieu?

Despite its arbitrary cut-off date of 1995, Frey's book brings to English-language readers fascinating and hitherto unexplored material from French film culture, including links between a number of filmmakers and the Right; as such it is a valuable and original addition to the literature on French cinema. The lack of illustrations is a pity, though this is compensated for by the wonderful cover picture of François Truffaut and his collection of Eiffel towers – chauvinistic perhaps, but attractive nonetheless. Ⓢ



Love is blind: *Un homme et une femme* (1966) is accused of glossing over France's colonial history

# Read



## JUST A SOUND GUY

The Life of a Film and Television Recordist

By Ken Mellor, Vanguard Press, 242pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781843867869  
Question: What do you call someone who has had tea with the Queen Mother, lunch with Morecambe and Wise and a clip round the ear from John Cleese? Answer: Just a Sound Guy. This is the title of Ken Mellor's autobiography of his 40-plus years as a sound recordist in film and television – from showbiz celebs to war-torn Vietnam. Through the changing years of production technology, from 35mm film to Umatic and Betacam video, it is a story of humour and hardship that is by turns heart-warming and harrowing. Having a family background in the cinema industry that dates back to the silent days ensured that his formative years were steeped in cinema lore. With more than 60 unpublished photos.

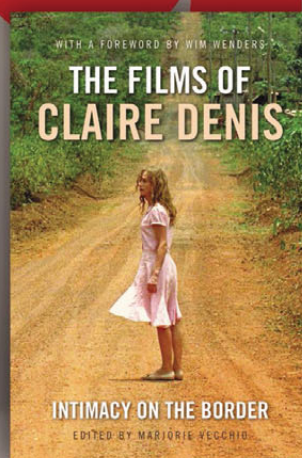
<http://bit.ly/11no6dp>



## BIG EYES: THE FILM, THE ART

By Leah Gallo, Titan Books, 192pp, hardback, illustrated, £24.99, ISBN 9781783297184  
*Big Eyes* is the new movie from iconic filmmaker Tim Burton. Margaret Keane's work was a pop sensation in the 1950s and 1960s. Fans purchased her artwork by the millions, but no one had any idea of the lies behind the eyes. It was a convoluted tangle of manipulation, oppression and betrayal, culminating in one woman's journey to reclaim her life and art. *Big Eyes: The Film, The Art* is the story of how Margaret's incredible life was brought to the big screen. Including a foreword by Burton, the book features behind-the-scenes images detailing everything from costume design to cinematography and explores the making of the movie from script to final cut. It also features original interviews with Amy Adams, Christoph Waltz, Margaret Keane, Tim Burton and Danny Elfman among many others and a substantial gallery of Margaret Keane's work.

<http://bit.ly/1xnBN9i>



## THE FILMS OF CLAIRE DENIS

Intimacy on the Border

Edited by Marjorie Vecchio, Foreword by Wim Wenders; I.B. Tauris; 264pp; hardback, £62, ISBN 9781848859531; paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781848859548  
The films of Claire Denis, one of the most challenging and respected of contemporary filmmakers, probe the psyche of global citizenship, family, desire, nationality and power. With subtlety, depth, minimalism and abstraction, her films explore connections between national experience and individual circumstance, visualising the complications of such dualities. In this book, international contributors explore the themes she addressed, and original interviews with those who have worked with Denis herself reveal fresh facets of this intrepid director. Filmmaker Wim Wenders provides a foreword to this book that "will hopefully throw many new lights on the amazing director that Klärchen [Claire Denis] became".

<http://bit.ly/1rxl0sm>



## SCI-FI: DAYS OF FEAR AND WONDER

Edited by James Bell, BFI, 160pp, paperback, illustrated, £16.99, ISBN 9781844578610  
*Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder* charts a course through the other worlds, future visions and altered states of sci-fi film and television, taking us from the magical invention of early cinema and onwards past the flying saucers, forbidden planets and Martian invaders of 1950s Cold War sci-fi and the adventures in space and time of Doctor Who. We journey deep into the virtual realities of cyberspace and through the nightmarish visions of future dystopias, meeting advanced artificial intelligences, biological mutations and alien lifeforms, and on to the special-effects-laden, galaxy-spanning entertainments of today. Through a range of lavishly illustrated new essays *Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder* shows that sci-fi is as much about ideas as spectacle, and how it expresses our sense of fear and wonder like no other genre.

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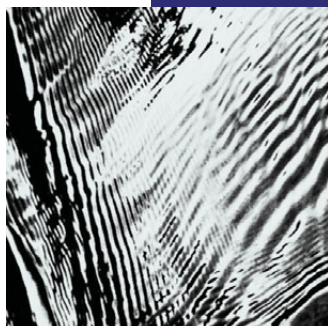


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# READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: [S&S@bfi.org.uk](mailto:S&S@bfi.org.uk)

## 'AN INVITATION IS NOT ENOUGH'

We are writing, as feminist filmmakers, academics, critics, curators, programmers and editors, in response to your November 2014 editorial ('The equalizers', *S&S*) and its "modest invitation" to female critics. The editorial was very welcome in its forthright recognition of *Sight & Sound*'s role in both creating and changing under-representation in the film industry, and we support your statement on the significance of film culture in shaping society. In response, we invite *S&S* to pay attention, regularly and assiduously, to the rich, diverse, exciting and present moment of feminist cinema and moving-image media, and the new feminist criticism emerging online, in the UK and beyond.

*S&S* remains the most important UK journal of filmmaking, one recognised worldwide for its continuing ability to define and advocate for independent and emerging cinemas, not least for its support of, and by, such definitional writers as Amy Taubin and B. Ruby Rich. Film criticism has a responsibility, as your editorial outlines, to use the power of coverage and advocacy so that filmmaking opportunities for women can translate into distribution, exhibition, audience and posterity.

An invitation is not enough: powerful organisations where there is systemic inequality have the responsibility to research and reach out, and to create change within the structure so that it is welcoming to diverse participants. LFF 2014 reached parity with international statistics for women in independent cinema, with 20 per cent of its feature programme directed or co-directed by women.

We believe *S&S* can do the same or better across its features as well as reviews, featuring new voices and new cinemas that offer more than a 'female gaze'. We are willing to help the magazine celebrate the plenitude that already exists, if it is willing to open up to us, our projects and our communities.

From **Sophie Mayer** freelance writer

and independent scholar, and **Ania**

**Ostrowska** film editor at 'The F-Word'

**Signed by:** **Abigail Addison** producer & associate director, *Animate Projects*; **Kim Akass** senior lecturer in film and TV studies, University of Hertfordshire;

**Mallory Andrews** editor, 'cléo' journal; **Anna**

**Backman Rogers** senior lecturer in film studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden; **Bidisha** human rights journalist and arts critic;

**Jo Blair** senior programmer and arts manager,

Picturehouse Cinemas; **Lisa**

**Bloom** visiting scholar,

Center for the Study of

Women, University of

California, Los Angeles;

**Lucy Bolton** lecturer in

*Carrington* (1995)



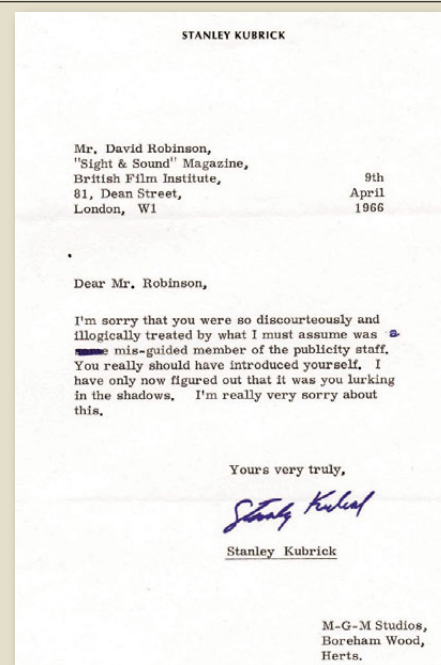
## LETTER OF THE MONTH LOST IN SPACE

It's always a shade disconcerting to be confronted by something you wrote half a century ago – and particularly a reportage that proved so challenging as my visit to the set (or rather sets) of 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, 13 weeks into the shoot – which you reprinted in your December issue ('David and his Goliaths', *S&S*).

I was landed in an enchanted world of vast technological structures of no evident purpose. At that moment no one (except presumably Kubrick and his close circle of consultants) had any idea what it was all about. Kubrick himself might have enlightened me, but the publicity team who had enthusiastically fixed up my visit were so awed (to say the least) by Kubrick, that they kept me as far away from him as possible, hidden in the shadows. The resulting essay could therefore do no more than describe the spectacular mysteries, and my long-shot view of the master at work.

Mr Kubrick subsequently learned what had happened, and wrote, so considerably that I kept his letter (right).

**David Robinson** by email



film studies, Queen Mary University of London; plus 64 others. The full list of signatories and a response from 'S&S' will be published online at [bit.ly/SSgender](http://bit.ly/SSgender)

## A BROADER CANVAS

Michael Brooke accurately states that Mike Leigh's 'Mr. Turner' is merely the latest in a long and distinguished tradition of films about painters ('Portraits of the artists', *S&S*, November 2014). It was refreshing to see the net cast wide to include films about female painters and painters from Japan. To this list can be added *Carrington* (1995), US TV films about Mary Cassatt and Georgia O'Keefe, and *Chihwaseon* (2002) about the 19th-century Korean painter Jang Seung-up. More recent additions to the genre include *Summer in February* (2013) about the horse painter Alfred Munnings, and *Big Eyes*, Tim Burton's recent study of Margaret Keane. I very much welcomed the reminder of two Ken Russell BBC films from the 1960s, though Dante's *Inferno* should be mentioned to complete his triptych on painters' lives. Particularly intriguing in this context are films that engage in some way with actual paintings, such as Jean-Luc Godard's

*Passion* (1982) in which the film-within-a-film recreates in *tableau vivant* style paintings by Goya, Velázquez, Rembrandt and Delacroix.

In *Uncovered* (1994) a restorer working on Pieter Van Huys's *The Game of Chess* (1471) discovers the secret 500-year-old message 'Who Killed the Knight?', thereby solving that and other crimes by analysing figures in the painting. Finally, Susan Seidelman's *The Dutch Master* (1995) has the figures in

Pieter Hooch's *Woman Drinking with Soldiers* (1658) come alive for a visitor to New York's Museum of Modern Art, who then steps into the painting's world to live out her autoerotic fantasies. All in all, almost an embarrassment of riches. **Paul Davies** by email

## GOD AND MONSTERS

Zvyagintsev's *Leviathan* is a great work, both about the human condition and the trials of life in Russia. However Ian Christie's article on the film, 'Here be monsters', and Ryan Gilbey's review and plot summary (*S&S*, December) miss out one of the main threads. Vadim, the mayor (artfully played by Roman Madyanov), is indeed corrupt, but he wants Kolia's land not to build a mansion – as Kolia suspects – but to build a church. The sermon that takes up the last minutes of *Leviathan* is delivered in the edifice that replaces Kolia's demolished home. In a long-shot the black sedans of the local fat cats depart the church across the familiar bridge. The delivery of the sermon by the bishop who advised mayor Vadim not to give in to Kolia's attempts to save his house makes clear the deeply anticlerical message; the bishop's motivation and hypocrisy are now explained.

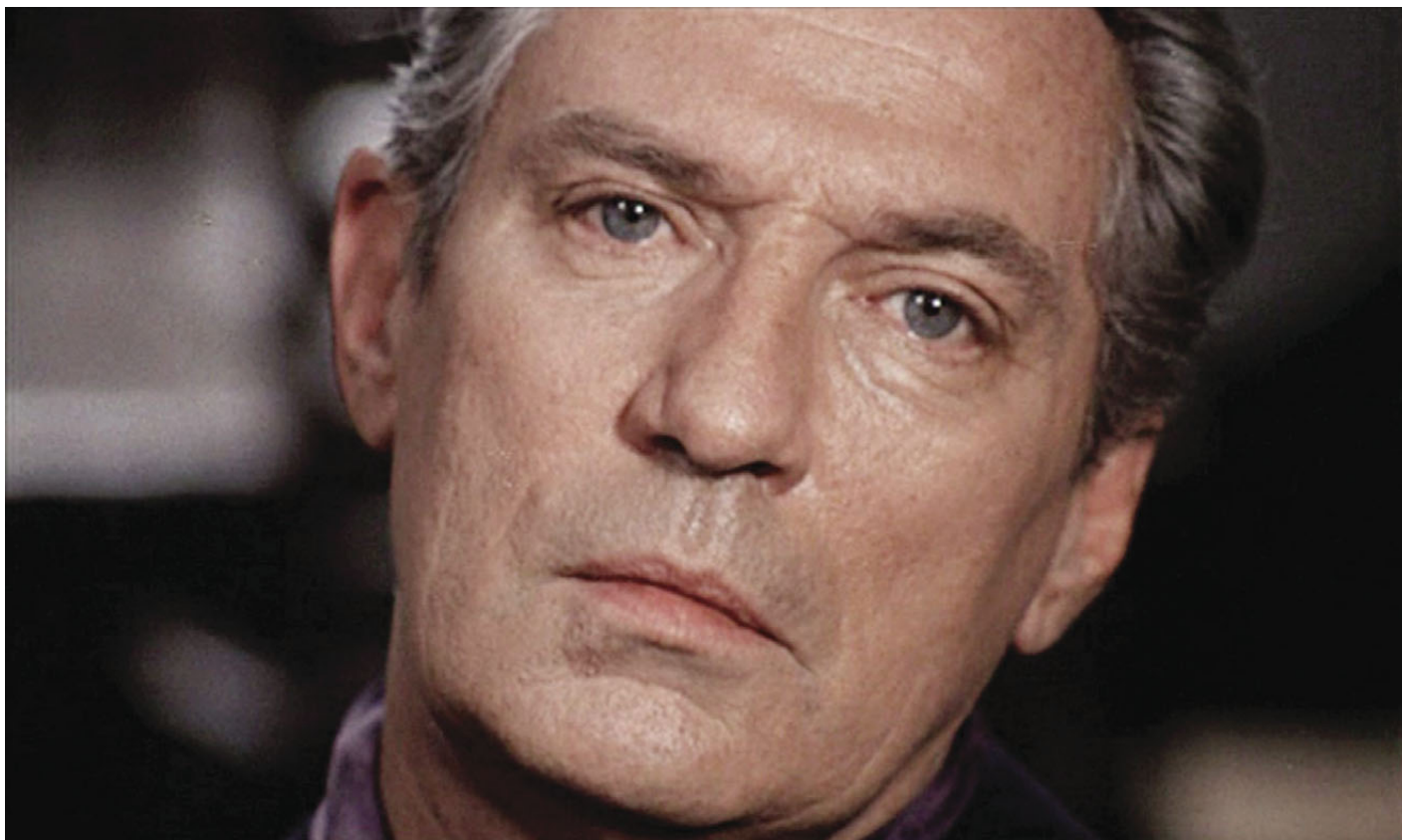
**Evan Mawdsley** Glasgow

## Additions and corrections

**December** p.64 *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, Certificate PG, 80m 59s; p.67 *The Case Against 8*, USA 2014. ©A Day in Court, LLC. Made possible with the generous support of Fancy Fechner, JP Richards, California Endowment, Cal Humanities in partnership with the NEH, Gucci Tribeca Documentary Fund, Southern Documentary Fund, Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program; p.68 *Citizenfour*, Certificate 15, 113m 27s; p.58 *Concerning Violence*, Certificate 15, 89m 9s; p.76 *The Imitation Game*, Certificate 12A, 114m 27s; p.77 *Leviathan*, Certificate 15, 141m 27s; p.78 *Life Itself*, Certificate 15, 120m 41s; p.86 *The Rewrite*, Certificate 12A, 102m 32s; p.90 *Stations of the Cross*, Certificate 15, 110m 26s; p.93 *Winter Sleep*, Certificate 15, 196m 29s



# SUNDAY BLOODY SUNDAY



John Schlesinger's subtle, complex portrait of the painful break-up of a *ménage-à-trois* reveals more about Englishness than it does about sex

**By Noel Hess**

John Schlesinger's 1971 film was a landmark in the discussion of sexuality and relationships in the British cinema. Lauded critically, though only moderately successful financially, its importance has been somewhat forgotten in recent years, perhaps as critical esteem for Schlesinger has fallen, especially in the context of his subsequent career. 'Strained seriousness' would probably be a category to which Schlesinger would now be relegated, but that would be to do an injustice to the subtlety and complexity of *Sunday Bloody Sunday*. Having been christened 'John Sledgehammer' by one US critic at the time of *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *Sunday Bloody Sunday* is notable (apart from a few lapses) for its restraint. It is probably seen now as too restrained, too muted, too civilised, too English in its account of the complex sexual relationships between a young bisexual artist (Murray Head), a female recruitment consultant (Glenda Jackson) and a doctor (Peter Finch) – and yet that is exactly its strength. It may even be saying more about 'Englishness' than about sex.

The ending is startling and audacious (and entirely the work of Penelope Gilliatt, even though her script was much rewritten). The final scene begins outside the home of Finch's character Daniel Hirsh, a London GP, on the Sunday of the title. Children are playing. It then cuts to an

interior: we see Hirsh at his desk, back to camera, in medium shot, listening to a 'teach yourself' Italian record. As he repeats the phrases, the camera tracks elegantly toward and around him and then turns to capture him directly to camera. As he finally abandons the language record in frustration, he addresses us, the audience, directly: "When you're at school and you want to quit, people say, 'You're going to hate it out in the world.' I didn't believe them and I was right. When I was a kid, I couldn't wait to be grown up, and they said, 'Childhood's the best time of your life.' It wasn't. And now, I want his company and they say, 'What's half a loaf? You're well shot of him.' And I say, 'I know it. But I miss him, that's all.' They say, 'He never made you happy.' And I say, 'But I am happy. Apart from missing him.' You might throw me a pill or two for my cough! All my life I've been looking for someone courageous, resourceful, and he's not it. But something... we were something. I only came about my cough."

The camera, by this point, has Hirsh's face in close-up, and stays on him for what feels a significant time (in fact it's not even ten seconds), in silence, before the end credits. What does his face convey? Confidence? Vulnerability? Loss? Resignation? Loneliness? Obviously such a shot is ripe for projection, and yet it is its very ambiguity that is so striking, and stays with us. How are we to read Hirsh's state of mind now he has lost his

*What does his face convey? Confidence? Vulnerability? Loss? Resignation? Loneliness? It is its very ambiguity that is so striking*

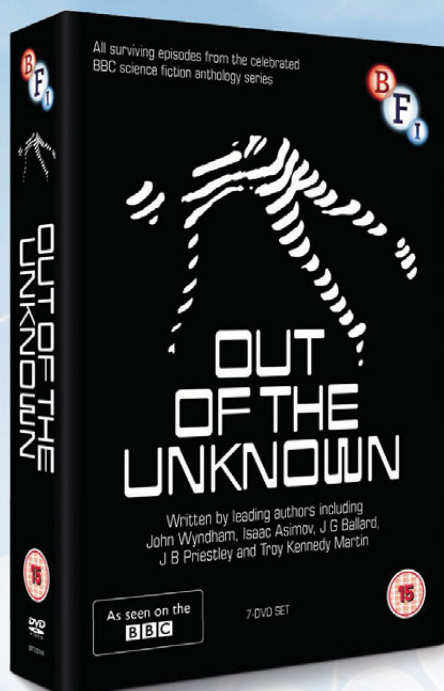
lover and has the task of carrying on with his life, alone? The final shot is so moving because it gives us no easy answer. It is a picture of a man in mid-life, intelligent, successful, alone, trying and failing to master the language of love and loss. Rarely does film portray such complex and ambivalent emotional states. And Finch plays it beautifully.

In this final monologue, he tells us that, for him, half a loaf was better than nothing; that he is happy, but he misses his lover, even though he wasn't really who he was looking for. "But we were something." And that something is lost. Clearly the doctor has become the patient, he is now the one in pain, and we have the task of understanding his pain. And the pain, it seems, is not overwhelming, it is bearable.

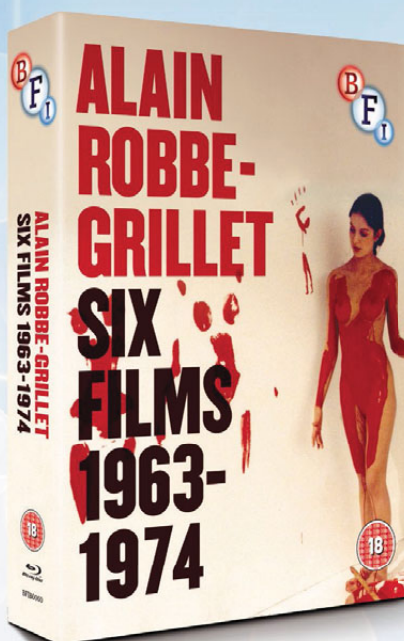
And what of "I only came about my cough"? It is a puzzling and enigmatic final line, but one way of reading it is as a crucial example of the idea of Englishness which is a major concern of the film. Hirsh is, I think, ironically quoting all those patients he saw over the years who felt a need to defend against the emotional significance of their consultation with their doctor; consultations in which they discussed the true origins of their emotional pain presenting as physical symptoms, but then needed to withdraw from the contact into reticence. It is perhaps a rather English phenomenon, to turn away from emotional pain by saying, "What's all the fuss about?" Read in this way, *Sunday Bloody Sunday* can be seen as part of that curious group of films concerned with anatomising Englishness – *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), *The Servant* (1963), *Accident* (1967), *If...* (1968), and crucially, the two TV films Schlesinger made with Alan Bennett, *An Englishman Abroad* (1983) and *A Question of Attribution* (1991).



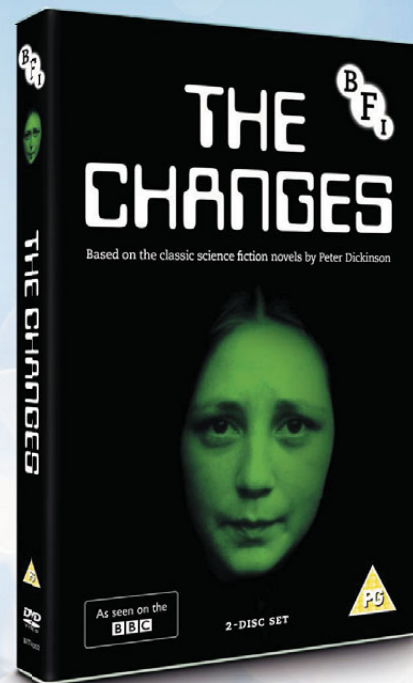
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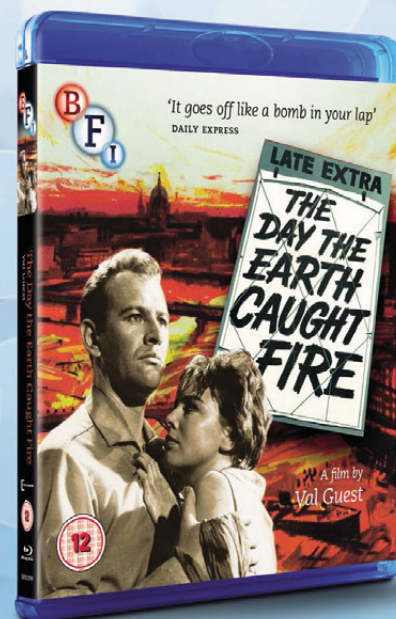
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